

Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction

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Consideration of requests submitted under Article 5

Request for an extension of the deadline for completing the destruction of anti-personnel mines in accordance with article 5 of the Convention*

Executive summary

Submitted by the Democratic Republic of the Congo

1. The history of the post-independence armed conflicts that have taken place in the Democratic Republic of the Congo – from 1960 to 1964, 1975 to 1977, 1996 to 1997 and 1998 to 2002 – is marked by the parties' use of anti-personnel mines.
2. Ten years after acceding to the Convention, the Democratic Republic of the Congo was granted an intermediate extension of 26 months to clarify the status of landmine contamination. This was followed by a further extension of six years in order to clear hazardous areas in a country with 25 provinces in addition to the capital, Kinshasa, 145 territories and more than 1,200 decentralized localities stretching over 2,345,410 km².
3. Since acceding to the Convention, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has undertaken in earnest to eradicate the problem of contamination, which has caused more than 2,789 identified casualties to date. This is an enormous challenge because of the numerous difficulties that must be overcome. The Democratic Republic of the Congo plans to meet its obligations under the Convention with support from the international community, particularly at this time when the latter is working towards eradicating the threat of anti-personnel mines.

Status of work done in the Democratic Republic of Congo

4. Prior to the article 5 extension, the challenge was to rationalize the national database containing records of 130 hazardous areas, covering 1.8 million m², that were discovered during the National Survey on Landmine and Cluster Munition Contamination and in the territories of Aru and Dungu, in the provinces of Ituri and Haut-Uélé, respectively, which were not surveyed owing to security problems.
5. At the same time, national coordination under the effective oversight of the Congolese Mine Action Centre – the national authority – improved noticeably thanks to the

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introduction of relevant programme management tools and capacity-building in the quality management and accreditation bodies.

6. In that context, the Democratic Republic of the Congo was granted a six-year extension beginning on 1 January 2015. Since then, clear planning, in the form of a national strategic plan and a multi-year work plan, enabled demining operators, including seconded units of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, DanChurchAid, Norwegian People's Aid, the Mines Advisory Group, Afrique pour la Lutte Antimines (Africa for Mine Action), Mechem and The Development Initiative, to set about clearing mined areas. They succeeded in removing 119 areas, measuring approximately 1.7 million m², from the list of 130 hazardous areas identified during the national survey. The 119 areas were located in the provinces of Bas-Uélé (2), Équateur (6), Haut-Katanga (2), Ituri (4), Kasai (13), Lualaba (5), Maniema (10), Nord-Ubangi (7), Sud-Ubangi (6), Sud-Kivu (4), Tanganyika (25), Tshopo (20) and Tshuapa (15).

7. However, 42 new mined areas with a combined surface area of 576,971.7 m² were discovered in the provinces of Bas-Uélé (3), Ituri (4), Kasai (1), Maniema (7), Nord-Kivu (1), Nord-Ubangi (9), Sud-Kivu (1), Sud-Ubangi (2), Tanganyika (4) and Tshopo (10). Twenty of these areas have been cleared.

8. Since the national survey was conducted, 172 mined areas have been discovered and 139 have been cleared manually. The Democratic Republic of the Congo currently has 33 mined areas with a total area of 128,841.7 m².

Circumstances which prevented compliance within the time limit of six years

9. The reasons why the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been unable to meet its treaty obligations within the six-year period set for 31 December 2020 are:

- (i) The unavailability or lack of maps of mined areas;
- (ii) Security problems and recurring armed conflict, including the proliferation of armed groups and the emergence of the terrorist movement Allied Democratic Forces-Madina Tawheed wal Muwahedeen (ADF-MTM), which claims to be the Central African branch of Islamic State;
- (iii) The sheer size and complexity of the country: inaccessibility, vegetation, poor state of the roads, changing weather conditions, etc.;
- (iv) Prioritization, given the other humanitarian and security emergencies in the country;
- (v) A noticeable decrease in funding;
- (vi) The reduction in the number of demining operators;
- (vii) The occurrence of various epidemics, such as Ebola virus disease in Équateur, Ituri and Nord-Kivu provinces, and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which has brought mine clearance operations to a standstill in the country.

Proposed duration and reasons for the extension

10. The Democratic Republic of the Congo requests an extension of 18 months, from 1 January 2021 – the date planned for the end of the previous extension – until 1 July 2022, assuming that the health requirements related to COVID-19 are lifted before the beginning of the requested extension period. This request is made for the following reasons:

- (i) To seek out and raise the funds required for the clearance of the remaining 33 hazardous areas, measuring 128,841.7 m²;
- (ii) To seek out the technical and financial means to allow the country to finalize the surveys in the territories of Aru and Dungu, in the provinces of Ituri and Haut-Uélé respectively, and to carry out the actual mine clearance;

(iii) To follow developments in the security situation (as mine clearance in some areas is contingent on operations carried out by the Armed Forces against armed groups);

(iv) To deal with unpredictable elements such as vegetation and weather patterns that, with the rains and floods, make it impossible to maintain a constant pace of mine clearance.

11. From the operational standpoint, based on the history of mine clearance work in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and taking into consideration the same capacity levels (the same demining operators, but with an increased number of teams, working constantly and intensively) and the availability of resources, it will take at least 12 months to complete the work, not counting deployment times and risks of delays owing to poor road conditions.

Humanitarian, social, economic and environmental implications of the extension

12. The humanitarian, social, economic and environmental implications are enormous and will have a major impact, especially in the provinces of Ituri (territories of Aru and Djugu), Kasai (territory of Tshikapa), Nord-Kivu (territory of Beni), Nord-Ubangi (territories of Mobayi-Mbongo and Yakoma), Maniema (territory of Lubutu), Sud-Kivu (territories of Fizi and Shabunda), Tshuapa (territory of Ikela), Tshopo (territory of Ubundu) and Tanganyika (territories of Moba, Kalemie and Kabalo).

13. The presence of mines in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has an adverse impact on food self-sufficiency and on gross domestic product. It thus contributes to worsening poverty and destitution in the affected communities.

14. The mines impact study has reported that a number of people are living with the daily threat of suspected or confirmed mine contamination in their immediate surroundings, resulting in blocked access to agriculture, housing and roads and tracks.

15. In addition to those thus affected, there are also refugees and displaced people. In partnership with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Democratic Republic of the Congo is continuing to work on the question of the return of Congolese refugees currently living in countries such as Uganda, Angola, Tanzania, Zambia, Burundi, the Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic and Malawi. It is also working to address the sensitive question of the many internally displaced people dispersed throughout the country, a large concentration of whom are in the east and in Kasai province.

16. Additionally, 2,797 victims of mines and explosive remnants of war have been identified throughout the country, most of whom have never received appropriate assistance. The outlook for their dependents, and also for those victims in inaccessible or remote areas of the country who are still to be identified, remains grim.

Plan of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to meet its obligations during the requested extension period

17. From the operational point of view, the Democratic Republic of the Congo will give priority first to conducting technical surveys and mine clearance in the remaining 33 areas contaminated by anti-personnel mines. An operational plan will be instituted as part of the process of drawing up the national strategic plan for the period from 2021 to 2025, which must take place before the date scheduled for the beginning of the requested extension period.

18. This work schedule will take into consideration the country's priorities: freeing up residential and agricultural areas, areas where roads are in need of repair and areas for the return of refugees and displaced persons.

19. The Democratic Republic of the Congo intends to consolidate the existing operational capacity of organizations already working in the country while building the

capacity of mine clearance personnel seconded from the Corps of Engineers to other branches of the Armed Forces and the Congolese National Police to carry out humanitarian demining activities.

20. Under the operational plan, it is envisaged that the larger and more complicated areas will be tackled first, in accordance with the above-mentioned priorities. The plan includes monthly projections according to which the surface area to be cleared, and the funding provided, will decrease over time.

21. During the extension period, the Congolese Mine Action Centre intends to improve the entire coordination system by updating national standards and by strengthening quality management (quality control and assurance) and information management. Working closely with all operators, the Centre will build the capacity of its staff in all aspects, in particular the management of residual contamination and improvised explosive devices.

22. The involvement of women in the process will be important because they are among the main victims of these devices in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Funding and technical means available to the Democratic Republic of the Congo to meet its obligations during the requested extension period

23. From the financial point of view, the country's needs for this period amount to approximately US\$ 3 million, of which US\$ 1,868,204.65 is needed for the clearance of 33 mined areas measuring 128,841.7 m² and US\$ 568,270 to complete surveying and mine clearance in the territories of Aru and Dungu in the provinces of Ituri and Haut-Uélé, respectively.

24. Around US\$ 880,000 will be required to carry out mine risk education activities throughout the extension period.

25. The Government has earmarked US\$ 564,221 from its own budget to cover the programme's operating costs, including coordination.

26. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is thus seeking approximately US\$ 3.4 million to complete the work within the period.

27. As for technical means, the plans call for most future mine clearance operations to be carried out manually and require the integration of mine risk education activities, in accordance with Actions 28 and 29 of the Oslo Action Plan.

28. The Democratic Republic of the Congo currently benefits from services provided by international and national demining operators whose manual and technical teams' technical capacity should be maintained so as to cover part of the needs mentioned above.

29. The manual clearance part will be strengthened by retraining five or six teams from the Armed Forces and the Congolese National Police who have already served with international demining operators. For them, it will be indispensable to receive training and new technical tools to ensure effective and efficient management of the work to be done during the extension period.
