

South Sudan Delegation to the APMBC 19th MSP
Statement/Talking Points (linked to presentation)

Slide One: Introduction

Mr. President, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, I am happy to be here to address the APMBC 19th Meeting of States Parties on behalf of the Government of the Republic of South Sudan. Please allow me to introduce myself as Hon Jurkuch Barach, the Chairperson of the National Mine Action Authority.

Slide Two: Progress Made Since 1 January 2020 (Date of entry into force of the extension)

After acceding to the mine ban convention, South Sudan was granted a 10-year period to meet all of its obligations under the APMBC which ended in July 2021. Despite significant efforts and substantial international support, many challenges hampered projected progress. Over time it became clear for South Sudan to meet its obligations, and on 20 November 2020 the APBMC unanimously approved the request for a five-year extension, until 9 July 2026, to fulfill its obligations under Article 5 of the Convention.

Since January 2020, a total of 4.9 million m² of land has been cancelled, 11 thousand m² has been reduced, 934 thousand m² has been cleared, and a further 5.8 million m² has been released. Additionally, 257 AP mines, and 336 ERW have been destroyed and 21 hazardous areas have been released.

Slide Three: Remaining Challenges as of 31 December 2020

As of 30 September 2021, 18.3 million m² of land was suspected of being contaminated within the country. There are 117 suspected and confirmed hazardous areas which are comprised of 40% of AP Minefields, 32% of cluster munitions, 5% of battlefields, 7% of AT Minefields and 16% of mined roads.

Slide Four: EORE Beneficiaries Since 1 January 2020

Explosive ordnance risk education (EORE) has been a cornerstone of mine action in South Sudan with the direct delivery of EORE given to more than four million people across the country. All risk education teams are gender balanced and access the entire community in order to understand their concerns and priorities. In 2020 and 2021, more than 400,000 people have received EORE and have demonstrated more than 80% of increased knowledge. As illustrated in the graph on this slide, boys showed the highest amount of increased knowledge and this is particularly important as statistically they are the most prone to injury and death from accidents in South Sudan.

Slide Five: Remaining contamination shown by the number of AP Minefields per Payam

Today, eight of South Sudan's ten states are known to be contaminated with minefields. However, the Equatorias and Jonglei have the largest number of these minefields, with 69 minefields in Central Equatoria, 22 minefields in Eastern Equatoria and 13 minefields in Jonglei.

Slide Six: Circumstances Impeding Completion

Not all political parties are adhering to the R-ARCSS and ongoing violence, and general insecurity has continued to affect the country which has had a severe impact on the clearance effort. In addition, it has added more contamination to be cleared.

COVID-19 has also undoubtedly impeded demining operations as the country has a very weak health infrastructure and medical response has continued to be problematic. The Government of the Republic of South Sudan has expressed concerns about the low uptake of Covid-19 vaccines.

The sector is not configured for efficient clearance of minefields as the widespread insecurity that has affected South Sudan since 2013 has led to a plethora of small mobile teams. These are ideally suited for survey work and the clearance of spot UXO tasks, but are not well suited to the efficient clearance of minefields. In order to deliver the more efficient clearance capacity that is needed to meet the extension request, mine action organizations are being encouraged to reconfigure their clearance teams to allow a greater balance of deminers on each task.

Poor infrastructure and intense seasonal rains, which are now continuously elongated and cause severe flooding, make access exceedingly difficult and reduce the demining season to eight months a year (in some areas to four months).

Access restrictions affecting the work plan implementation and frequent relocation of big teams negatively impact operational efficiency, and the NMAA is continuously trying to negotiate with different actors to ensure operations can safely commence and implement both survey and clearance as well as EORE.

Slide Seven: Estimated Progress towards Extension Finish Line—Milestones:

South Sudan now has a reasonably clear picture of the remaining contamination in areas within its jurisdiction and control. With surveys completed, expansion and capacity building of the current demining operators, South Sudan is optimistic about completing its five-year extension request and its commitment to complete the clearance of all mined areas in the country by 2026. However, to achieve this South Sudan needs the continued support on the international community. This slide illustrates the anticipated implementation plan and how we will successfully achieve this goal.

(Speak about numbers on slide)

Slide Eight: Going Forward

In the next five years, South Sudan will continue to define the true extent and nature of its contamination through survey activities, targeting the deployment of both manual and mechanical demining teams to deliver the most efficient clearance solutions, as well as support the NMAA, and national clearance capacity efforts.

In addition, we will continue advocating for much needed donor support to the mine action sector which is highly critical as increased funding is essential to complete our goal by 2026. Funding for mine action continues to be a challenge and has gradually decreased year after year due to competing aid needs and emergencies within the country.

Of note, NMAA is currently undertaking the revision of the APMBC Extension Work Plan in order that it remains fit for purpose, and we are committed to submitting an updated version by 30 April 2022.

Challenges for implementation are foreseen such as: COVID-19, security, environmental changes, seasonal access limitations, etc., and may hamper our implementation, but again, we are confident that together with your support South Sudan will reach this goal by 2026.

Slide Nine: Thank you!

Dear esteemed colleagues, to conclude, the ongoing insecurity coupled with legacy contamination continues to prevent the delivery of vital humanitarian aid and continues to threaten the safety of individuals, communities, and humanitarian actors. However, if peace can prevail and as more communities continue to return and expand the demand for land for housing, agriculture and infrastructure, mine action will continue to be a key 'enabler' for the communities across the country, and well as central to sustainable development in South Sudan. Thank you once again for the opportunity to present on behalf of the Government of the Republic of South Sudan and the National Mine Action Authority. We highly value the partnerships that have made it possible to make the progress that has been made so far, and look ahead to working hand in hand in fulfilling our obligations under Article 5 of the Convention.