

Statement on behalf of the Group of African States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction by NAMIBIA

15 November 2021

Mr. President,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of African States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction.

Please accept, Ambassador Robbert Jan Gabriëlse, the Group's heartiest congratulations on your election to the Presidency of the 19th meeting of States parties to the Convention.

In the same vein, we would also would like to congratulate the Members of the Bureau on their election and express gratitude for the considerable efforts you have made, together with the Committees; throughout this year, despite the unprecedented circumstances dictated by the global health crisis due to the Covid-19 pandemic. We are confident in your ability to steer the proceedings of the Assembly to a successful outcome and to assure you of our full support and cooperation.

We are also pleased to convey the Group's deepest appreciation to your predecessor, Ambassador Osman Abufatima Adam Mohammed of Sudan.

The Group wishes to express its gratitude to the Government of the Netherlands for hosting this meeting.

Mr. President,

Bearing in mind the important role played by the African Union in working towards achieving the goal of a mine free Continent, the Group reaffirms its firm commitment to end the suffering and casualties caused by anti-personnel mines to all people.

To this end, we call for intensified efforts to complete the time-bound obligations as soon as possible, and to the fullest extent possible by 2025, in accordance with the objectives outlined by the Oslo Action Plan (2019-2024), and in line with the achievements of the Nairobi, Cartagena and Maputo Action Plans.

Anti-personnel mines remain a persistent disarmament and humanitarian problem, which in turn contributes to a sense of insecurity in the international peace and security architecture. We can no longer extend this deadline due to the increasing and pressing expectations of the affected populations.

The Group echoes the Oslo Declaration's support for the efforts to promote universal adherence to the Convention's norms and objectives and the condemnation of the use of anti-personnel mines by any actor.

We express strong concern that anti-personnel mines continue to be used in some conflicts, causing untold human suffering and impeding post-conflict development.

The collective suffering of humanity due to Covid 19 has not stopped the pain that was and is still being inflicted on innocent people across the world by anti-personnel mines, which continued to claim lives and inflict victims during this difficult period.

Contamination by anti-personnel mines and the rise in the number of casualties caused by the same continue to pose a serious threat to human life and impede sustainable development, reminding us of the continued relevance of the Convention.

Today, both at the continental and the international levels, universalization and implementation constitute the main challenges to the Convention. The task at hand is to balance on the one hand, expanding the number of States Parties to Convention; and on the other hand, ensuring that all State Parties comply with their obligations.

With the aim of universalizing the Convention, we reiterate the call made to all states that have not signed the APMBC, through the General Assembly resolution 75/52, adopted by an overwhelming number of States Parties on 7 December 2020.

Mr. President,

In an effort to realize the objectives of the Convention, States Parties are saving lives, protecting people, assisting victims and enabling sustainable development in affected areas. This demonstrates both the relevance and the importance of the full and effective implementation of and compliance with the Convention.

Despite that significant progress has been made in protecting women, girls, boys and men from the threat and use of anti-personnel mines to date through demining vast areas of territories and ensuring that victims

and survivors of Anti-Personnel Mines lead dignified lives, many challenges still remain.

Notwithstanding that mine action is recognized as a humanitarian protection activity as well as a key enabler for development, humanitarian action, peace and security, the implementation of the Convention contributes significantly to preventing human suffering, and in turn, to advancing the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

We welcome the document entitled « Achieving the aims of the Oslo Action Plan: Progress Report 2020-2021” and look forward to working together to achieve the priorities of the period 2021-2022.

We call upon all States and other relevant parties to work together, in line with the Oslo Action Plan to promote, support and advance the care, rehabilitation and social and economic reintegration of mine victims, mine risk education and reduction programmes, the removal and destruction of anti-personnel mines placed or stockpiled throughout the world and the strengthening of international cooperation and assistance, as essential elements required for the continued success of the Convention.

We are proud of the contribution of African countries to the work of the Convention, namely Zambia as Chairman of the Committee on the Implementation of Article 5 and Algeria as member and incoming Chairman of the Committee on victim assistance.

The Group recognizes the special partnerships of the Convention with the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining in support of implementing the Convention and beyond, and considers it important to foster partnerships with civil society in the aim of achieving the goals of the Convention.

The Group also stresses the need to take into account the need for full, equal and balanced participation of women and men in mine action.

Mr. President,

Our Continent is more than ever united around the issues that brought us here today, our united voices paint a picture of what we desire for ourselves, for future generations and the Continent as stated in the

Agenda 2063 entitled, ***The Africa we want*** and the African Union Master Roadmap of Practical Steps to Silencing the Guns in Africa by 2020.

This engagement is clearly reflected through, inter alia, the *Common African Position on Anti-Personnel Landmines*, the *AU Mine Action and explosives remnants of war strategic framework* and the relevant decisions of the AU Peace and Security Council, including its recent communique adopted on 16 September 2021 on the *Continental and regional activities in the area of Mine Action*.

A large majority of African Union member States, fifty-one (51) out of fifty-five (55), are parties to the Convention, and it remains our hope to see them all become States Parties. This number, largely reflects the will of the African continent to put an end to this scourge and its devastating effects, especially the unacceptable injuries to innocent civilians resulting in humanitarian suffering and rendering of mined areas unusable, and entrenching poverty in the affected areas decades after armed conflicts.

Furthermore, the African countries have made efforts to integrate the provisions of the Convention and the implementation activities into national development plans, including efforts to ensure the consideration of gender, age, disability and needs of people in affected communities, despite the Pandemic context and obstacles.

Currently, eleven (11) AU Member States have completed Article 5 implementation, while fourteen (14) AU Member States are yet to fulfil their mine action clearance obligations stemming from Article 5, whilst others continue to work to fully comply with APMBC-related obligations and help other Member States to do so.

In this context, we thank all the stakeholders for their commitment and engagement in this cause and reiterate the importance of their continued financial support.

In conclusion, the Group highly appreciates the work of the Implementation Support Unit and the assistance provided to all African Member States Parties.

Thank you