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Uganda

Uganda free of landmines – a milestone accomplishment

News and Press Release

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On December 10th 2012, Uganda is officially declared free of landmines at a ceremony in the capital of Kampala. The achievement is the result of dedicated work by the National Mine Action Programme in Uganda in collaboration with Danish Demining Group (DDG), the humanitarian mine action unit of the Danish Refugee Council.

Following years of conflict between Uganda People's Defence Force and the Lord's Resistance Army in northern and western parts of Uganda, large swathes of land were left heavily contaminated by landmines and other explosive remnants of war (ERW). Now all identified minefields in the country have been cleared, which means that Uganda has lived up to the promise made when it signed the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention in 1997.

"Over the years landmines has resulted in many fatal or crippling incidents and in addition to the loss of lives and limbs the fear of using otherwise productive land for agriculture or pasture for livestock has impeded development – the conclusion of the demining efforts marks a new beginning for the people of Uganda," says Head of DDG, Rasmus Stuhr Jakobsen.

In 2007, DDG started providing technical assistance to the Office of the Prime Minister in order to accelerate Uganda's National Mine Action Programme that was in a standstill at the time. The figures speak for themselves: In 2006 there were some 300 civilian victims of explosions from mines and other ERW. In 2011, five people were maimed or killed, while 2012 saw three victims.

Since 2007 DDG has trained and equipped 130 police and military personnel under the government programme and deployed them to clear minefields near the northern and western borders. The teams, who operate under their own command structures, have increased their reach and capacity greatly through the assistance provided in information management, mapping, logistics, technical advisory, and material support.

To date, 46 former battlefields have been cleared by these teams, resulting in the disposal of thousands of landmines and tens of thousands of other ERW. Twice, in 2010 and 2012, Norwegian People's Aid sent their mechanical clearance machines from South Sudan to assist the operation. The contaminated areas extended over 12 districts, together comprising an area roughly the size of Denmark. During mine clearance operations, DDG provided mine risk education for 111,000 residents, of which 80% were children, across 600 villages and 670 schools in contaminated areas.

“DDG is proud to have played a part in this milestone accomplishment alongside the government in Uganda. The mutual efforts have greatly improved both the safety and livelihoods opportunities for many Ugandans. We are now focusing our work on further improving safety and security in Uganda through Armed Violence Reduction, benefiting populations affected by armed conflict,” says Rasmus Stuhr Jakobsen.

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