



2ND CONTINENTAL CONFERENCE OF AFRICAN EXPERTS ON LANDMINES KEMPTON PARK - SEVEN YEARS AFTER ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

15-17 SEPTEMBER 2004

African Countries Agree to the Importance of Engaging Non-State Actors

From 15 - 17 September 2004, the Second Continental Conference of African Experts on Landmines took place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in accordance to the African Union's Executive Council decision EX.CL/Dec.164(V) and the Plan of Action adopted during the First Conference in 1997 which goal is the establishment of the African continent as an Anti-Personnel Mine Free Zone.

The meeting aimed at preparing an African Common Position on Anti-Personnel Landmines to be submitted to the Review Conference in Nairobi (to date 48 African states have joined the Convention); at reviewing progress made and at assessing the implementation of the APM Ban Convention by African States. All issues were dealt with: Political Policies; Mine Clearance, Victim Assistance, Mine Action and Development and Inter-African and International Co-operation and Assistance.

The Conference was attended by Member States of the AU, as well as various United Nations (UN) specialized agencies, other international organizations, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), a wide spectrum of representatives of the donor and mine action communities and relevant Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). ICBL members and friends in attendance included, Negus Ambachew (RaDO), Noel Stott (ISS), Mereso Agina (KCBL), Kerry Brinkert (GICHD) and Sara Sekkenes (NPA), Julie Dabo (Geneva Call). It was chaired by Ambassador Esther Tolle and Ambassador Wolfgang Petritsch was present.

Regarding NSAs engagement, Noel Stott, presented a paper on 'The Ban on Landmines and its implications for Non-State Actors in Africa' using material provided by S. Santos and Geneva Call. Noel highlighted the need to engage NSAs in the context of the OAU/AU's Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism, the AU's Common African Defence and Security Policy and the AU's Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union. The presentation ended with a description of Geneva Call's Deed of Commitment as an important means to obtain the commitment of armed non-states actors to a landmine ban and concluded with a call for the AU and its member states to:

- Continue to support mine action to assist affected populations in areas under the control of NSAs, particularly in areas under the control of actors who have agreed to abide by the norm of non-use of anti-personnel landmines;
- Continue promoting universal observance of this norm;

- Underscore the need to monitor the activities of NSAs and facilitate their commitment;
- Support the work of Geneva Call and to encourage NSAs to sign and comply with the Deed of Commitment.

The ultimate result of the presentation was the inclusion of a paragraph (Paragraph A. XI) in the Africa's new Common Position recognising the need to engage with groups other than States. It says:

"Calls on all relevant Non-State Actors to respect the international norm established by the APM Ban Convention and welcomes efforts by NGOs to engage those Actors, with the aim of securing their commitment to respect the highest standards of international law and humanitarian norms".

It should be noted that the paragraph went through a number of amendments before the final language was agreed to as some countries such as Tunisia raised concerns. Other countries such as Libya were very interested in the topic.

A copy of the presentation and of the Common African Position is available from Julie Dabo (jdabo@genevacall.org)