



Press Release

The Polisario Front carries out third landmine destruction operation

Geneva/Tifariti, 21 May 2008 – On 21 May, the Polisario Front destroyed 2'000 anti-personnel (AP) mines in Tifariti, Western Sahara. This is the third such stockpile destruction operation (totaling 8'642 AP mines) since the Polisario signed the Geneva Call *Deed of Commitment for Adherence to a Total Ban on Anti-Personnel Mines and for Cooperation in Mine Action* in November 2005. By signing the *Deed of Commitment*, the Polisario Front committed to renouncing the use of AP mines, to destroying all AP mines stocks in its possession and to facilitating mine action activities. Abdelkader Taleb Omar, Saharawi Prime Minister, and other Polisario officials attended the event. Geneva Call, the Saharawi Campaign to Ban Landmines (SCBL), and Landmine Action UK – which provided technical assistance – observed the destruction site before and after the operation. Government representatives and the international media also witnessed the event.

According to the Minister of Defense of the Polisario Front, Mohamed Lamine Bouhali, “the Polisario is determined to meet its obligation to destroy its AP mine stockpile under the *Deed of Commitment* and will continue to support mine action for the benefit of the population. It deeply regrets Morocco’s policy of not being a signatory to the Mine Ban Treaty, which can only further hamper the long road towards a mine free Western Sahara.” The Kingdom of Morocco, which controls part of Western Sahara territory, cites the dispute with the Polisario Front as the main obstacle to its accession to the treaty.

Elisabeth Decrey Warner, President of Geneva Call, and Boybat Cheikh Abdelhay, President of the SCBL, congratulated the Polisario Front for having chosen to ban AP mines despite the absence of a political settlement, thereby demonstrating its attachment to humanitarian principles. It is hoped this new step forward will increase awareness about the risks that mines and unexploded ordnance continue to pose and the needs for assistance of the primarily nomadic population.

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