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Commemorating International Mine Awareness Day

4 April 2014

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

REMARKS BY MR EL-GHASSIM WANE

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AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION

Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the African Union Commission, I welcome you to this event aimed at commemorating the International Mine Awareness and Assistance day. Let me take this opportunity to thank the UN Mine Action Services (UNMAS), the UN Office to the African Union (UNOAU), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Mine Wolfe for their invaluable support in ensuring that on this day, just as it was last year, we raise awareness on the problem of landmines in Africa.

The reason we commemorate this day is to bring to light the fact that even when Peace agreements have been signed and hostilities ceased, landmines and other explosive remnants of war (ERW) remain an enduring legacy of conflict. Both landmines and ERWs pose a serious and ongoing threat to civilians. These weapons can be found on roads, footpaths, in and surrounding houses and schools, and in other places where people are carrying out their daily activities. They deny access to food, water, and other basic needs, and inhibit freedom of movement. They pose a challenge to the repatriation of refugees and internally displaced people, and hamper the delivery of humanitarian aid. These weapons instill fear in communities, and are a lethal barrier to development and post-conflict reconstruction.

However, there are solutions to this global landmine and ERW problem. The 1997 Mine Ban Treaty provides a great framework for governments to alleviate the suffering of civilians living in areas affected by antipersonnel mines. Governments who join this treaty must stop the use, stockpiling, production, and transfer of antipersonnel mines immediately. They must destroy all stockpiled antipersonnel mines within four years of joining the treaty, and clear all antipersonnel mines in all mined areas under their jurisdiction within 10 years. In addition, States Parties must also provide assistance for the care and treatment of landmine survivors, their families and communities, and support for mine/ERW risk education programs to help

prevent mine incidents. These legal instruments provide a framework for taking action, but it is up to governments to implement treaty obligations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In response to this, I am pleased to inform you that 51 AU Member States have signed and ratified the Mine Ban Treaty. The strides made by Governments in ensuring that the problem of landmines and the plight of landmine survivors get the necessary attention, is commendable. Your efforts have not gone un-noticed. Governments have worked with partners such as the UN, ICRC, Norwegian People's Aid, Japan to name a few and various other stakeholders on the ground to outline national mine action programs as well applied resources towards the implementation of these programs.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On this day last year, the AUC expressed its commitment to work with Member States towards achieving the goal of a landmine free Africa and stated that it will continue to pay sustained attention to the problem of explosive remnants of war.

The Commission pledged its support to Member States in:

- i. The establishment of a framework for regular consultations, gathering affected AU Member States and international organizations working in mine action to help coordinate the African position.
- ii. Development of a three year plan (2013-2015) aimed at galvanizing support for Member States and co-coordinating mine action activities; and
- iii. Facilitating intra-African cooperation amongst Member States by assisting one another meet their obligations under the Conventions. This is envisaged through the exchange of equipment and expertise.

It is my great pleasure to inform you that the Commission has successfully been able to achieve these three deliverables and more, and will continue to work with AU Member States in their mine action activities. The Commission will begin the implementation of the strategic framework document that outlines a three year work plan and hopes that through the support of our valued partners ICRC and UNMAS/ UNOAU, we will be able to that ensure that AU Member States come first in their mine action programs.

Within our commitment to mine action and in response to requests received from these Member States: Ethiopia, Mauritania, Sudan and Zimbabwe, it is my honour to inform you that the AU Commission has procured de-mining equipment to be used in your Countries as a modest contribution to you towards meeting your mine clearance obligations. The Commission remains committed to support Member States in building their capacity to ensure that all mined areas are cleared.

Distinguished Participants,

This year's International Day of Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action is dedicated to the important contribution made by women. The theme 'Women in Mine Action' aims to highlight the important contribution made by women. Promoting the work of women in mine action ensures that mine action work is more efficient and effective. Indeed, women must be empowered in all societies to be a part of important activities and decisions, in all stages of mine action as well as broader issues around peace, security and development. Already we can see the women de-miners in many programs across the Continent who have joined their male counterparts in ensuring that their communities become safer environments for all. A sign that shows that Gender mainstreaming is making its way into in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all programs. The United Nations has developed new Gender Guidelines for Mine Action Program to help mine-action policymakers and field personnel incorporate gender perspectives into all operations of mine action. We will work together with the UN to explore how the AU can use these guidelines whilst ensuring that they capture and

reflect African perspectives, lessons learned and best practices from around the Continent in gender mainstreaming

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I once again want to thank you all, on behalf of the Commission, for being here today. Your presence here is a valuable step towards showing our commitment towards this cause. I look forward to engaging with you in other platforms.

I thank you for your attention.