



## APPEL DE GENÈVE GENEVA CALL

### Geneva Call in the Press

#### **Somalia: forty people killed by landmines in 2003**

Source: Integrated Regional Information Networks - 3 December 2004



Forty people were killed by landmines in Somalia during 2003 out of 75 reported casualties, an international humanitarian organisation, Geneva Call, reported on Thursday.

The findings are contained in a report of the first joint assessment of the mine problem in the Somali region of Hiraan and Bakool since 1991.

"There is little or no mine action currently underway in central and south Somalia," Pascal Bangard, programme coordinator with Geneva Call, told a group of mine-advocacy groups and donors in Nairobi. "There is a need for rapid action to reduce the impact of landmines and UXOs [unexploded ordnance] in Somalia, starting with mine-risk education and clearance."

Although the exact scale of the landmine problem in Somalia was unknown, it has had a significant negative impact on the local population, resulting in human and livestock casualties, denial of pastoral and cultivable land, and road closures, the report said.

"The most affected today are young children who do not know the dangers of landmines, and girls and women collecting firewood," Suleiman Haji Abdulle, manager of the Puntland Mine Action Centre, told IRIN after the launch of the report.

The assessment team, which included specialists from Geneva Call, the Swiss Foundation for Mine Action and the Danish Demining Group (DDG), visited Puntland and surrounding areas from 15 to 27 September and met with local authorities, UN agencies, NGOs and landmine survivors.

Nick Bateman, DDG programme manager, however, said "although there is a clear humanitarian impact, the situation is well-managed by the local population and, overall, not too severe".

"The problem is manageable and could, with the necessary international assistance, be resolved within a limited timeframe," Bateman added. Still, the UN Development Programme in Somalia said "progress will be slow and cautious", adding that some factions were still planting mines.

Ahmed Esa, director of the Institute for Practical and Research Training in Hargeisa, Somaliland, was more optimistic based on his experience with the Somaliland Coalition Against Landmines, established in 1998.

"Just five years ago, following years of conflict, Hargeisa was a destroyed city with no roofs on the houses and every house was mined," he noted. "At that time, there were two landmine incidents reported per day in Hargeisa City alone. Now, we have an annual rate of approximately 100 per year throughout Somaliland."

Bangard said that Geneva Call had sought to establish a dialogue with Somali fighters, warlords and other non-state actors excluded from participation in the intergovernmental Ottawa Convention on landmines to obtain their commitment towards a mine ban.

"Sixteen Somali faction leaders have signed a commitment to adhere to a ban on anti-personnel mines," he said. "As the new government acquires international recognition, Geneva Call advocates the official accession of Somalia to the Ottawa Treaty and the implementation of its obligations under that agreement."

On 1 December, the signatories to the convention - at the Summit on a Mine-Free World underway in Nairobi - provisionally adopted their 2005-2009 action plan which highlights a coordinated approach to meeting that treaty's humanitarian aims.

Martin Barber, director of the UN Mine Action Service, said in a statement the UN would focus its efforts in the coming years to get non-state actors to adhere to the mine-ban treaty's standards to provide for victim assistance and to encourage donors to commit sustained resources to mine action.

According to the International Coalition to Ban Landmine's annual publication, Landmine Monitor Report 2004, some 28 African countries and the territories of Somaliland and Western Sahara are mine-affected.

Meanwhile, Somalia's new Prime Minister Ali Mohammed Gedi appealed to the international community on Friday to assist the war-torn nation to eradicate landmines, saying mines were a "threat to reconstruction efforts".

"Now that peace is in hand, we request you to join these nations in supporting our efforts to free Somalia from the scourge of landmines," Gedi told delegates at the Nairobi conference on landmines.

Gedi was named Somalia's interim prime minister last month, an appointment that marked the culmination of a two-year reconciliation conference sponsored by the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development that brought together representatives from various clans and factions.

Somalia had ceased to function as a modern state in 1991 when armed groups overthrew the regime of Siyad Barre, precipitating a ruinous civil war that saw numerous warring warlords and their militias carve the country into fiefdoms.

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