Statement

By

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At

The Thematic Cluster Debate on Conventional Weapons by the Sixth Committee of the United Nations 61st Session General Assembly

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Madam Chairperson,

Allow me to begin my statement by welcoming the various reports presented to the Committee on behalf of the United Nations Department of Disarmament Affairs, particularly the report by H.E. Ambassador Prasad Kariyawasam, Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the UN, in his capacity as president of the UN Conference to Review the Progress made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (SLAW), as well as the report presented by Mr. Roberto Garcia Moritan, Chairman of the Group of Governmental Experts on the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms.

Indeed, despite the lack of desired progress in the Review Conference on the implementation of SLAW, as spelled out in the report and in the statements made by many delegations, we remain confident the Committee would succeed in finding the way forward by drawing from lessons learned, and banking on some of the positive outcomes achieved in the process.

Madam Chairperson,

Although my country is invariably concerned with the various disarmament issues pertaining to conventional weapons, canvassed in this thematic discussion of the Committee, I would rather dwell on an area of particular interest for Ethiopia, which is the issue of landmines.

Being a country severely affected by the widespread havoc of unexploded ordnance (UXO) inherited from the legacy of past external wars and internal conflicts, particularly in its northern and eastern parts, Ethiopia has been staggering to withstand the painful devastation caused by these deadly devices.

Thus, in view of the tremendous harm being inflicted on human lives, as well as on development activities, particularly agriculture, the Government of Ethiopia has already designed an all-rounded national plan, and has also established a responsible body: namely, the Ethiopian Mine Action Office, at the Federal level, so as to effectively deal with the problem.

Thanks to the concerted national action in this regard, a number of promising results have been registered so far in the course of the past few years alone, as elucidated by the following practical instances.

- A national Landmine Impact Survey was conducted in the year 2003/2004, hence indicating that over 1.9 million people in the country are directly or indirectly affected by Land Mines;
• Out of the total identified areas, about 2,226 hectares of land has been cleared of unexploded Mines from March 2002 - March 2006;
• During the above mentioned clearing operation, 1,663 anti-personnel and 23,901 anti-tank unexploded mines were safely removed and detonated;
• 76% of the total land area thus far cleared of mines has been put to use for economic and social development activities by the local communities;
• The rehabilitation of landmine survivors has been given paramount importance by the Government of Ethiopia, which is doing its level best to find a lasting solution for the victims with the help of some concerned international organizations and NGO’s;
• In terms of creating popular awareness in relation to land mines, about 216,263 inhabitants of three major regions have been given Mine Risk Education since January 2003, and this task is being continued on a sustainable basis. A strong sense of collaboration is also being nurtured with the local community in those affected areas, hence expediting the identification and clearing up of UXO;
• Moreover, the process of setting up a national committee, comprising all domestic stakeholders, as well as assigning a National Focal Point for the effective implementation of the Ottawa Convention is currently well under way, and is expected to be finalized in a short period of time.

We are confident that, once this essential process is satisfactorily completed, Ethiopia will be yet in a better position to fulfill all its treaty obligations, including the submission of national reports on a regular basis, in the near future.

Madame Chairperson,

As one of the 24 Parties to the Ottawa Convention known to have a high number of mine victims and survivors, it needs to be underscored here that Ethiopia needs continued financial and technical assistance commensurate with the extent of the outstanding problem to be tackled. Indeed, while the international community, particularly the developed countries and the concerned bodies of the United Nations, deserve to be thanked for the kind assistance they have extended to Ethiopia so far, we remain confident that their cooperation will be intensified with a view to buttressing our effort at the national level.

Let me conclude, Madame Chairperson, by reaffirming Ethiopia's firm commitment to discharge all its treaty obligations, as well as to uphold the United Nations resolutions hitherto adopted in the area of disarmament in general, and with respect to conventional weapons in particular.

I thank you.