

The Nairobi Summit: Expectations from an African Perspective

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There are three important elements which form the background to the significance and expectations of African countries on the forthcoming Summit. These are: Africa's role in the negotiations leading up to the Convention; the extent of the mine problem in the continent and, the symbolism of the venue of the Summit.

a) Involvement in the making of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention.

African countries participated quite actively in the negotiations on this all-important treaty. Indeed towards the conclusion of the Convention, African countries held their first continental or regional meeting on the question of banning anti-personnel mines. This was in Kempton Park, South Africa, from 19 to 21 May 1997.

At this meeting attended by representatives of no less than 40 countries, a Plan of Action was drawn up. This focused on four main areas which closely reflect the four core aims of the Convention, then in the advanced stages of gestation, namely:

i) Policy on landmines

Under this topic, the meeting resolved amongst other things, that the question of mines needed to be addressed in a "coordinated and multi-faceted manner leading to a comprehensive ban on landmines." It also set a goal of elimination of landmines in Africa and establishing the continent as an "anti-personnel mine free zone." Furthermore, it called on all States to actively participate in the process leading up to the conclusion of the Convention – especially the Brussels and Oslo conferences respectively of June and September 1997. This alludes to the principle of universalisation. Indeed on 15 – 16 February 2001, a seminar on the implementation and universalisation of the Convention in Africa was held in Bamako, Mali in which the importance of regional cooperation was stressed.

ii) Mine Clearance

In this regard, the Kempton Park meeting underlined the link between the total ban on mines and mine clearance. It stressed the importance of developing institutions, data bases as well as methods and appropriate technologies in accelerating the demining process. It also called for mobilization of resources for this process.

iii) Assistance to Landmine Survivors

The meeting urged African governments to take greater cognizance of the plight of survivors and victims of landmines and to substantively address both their health and social needs. It also urged governments to actively involve landmine survivors in the formulation and implementation of national policy and legislation.

iv) International Cooperation and Finance

The meeting called for closer international cooperation between countries themselves and with financial institutions and other organizations to generate adequate resources for assistance. It equally stressed the importance of South – South cooperation.

These four areas of emphasis accurately fall under the core Convention objectives which are the destruction of existing stockpiles, clearing mined areas, assisting landmine survivors, and universalisation, respectively.

Therefore, the African region has been quite focused on achieving the core aims of the Convention.

b) Impact of Mines

Africa remains the most mine-affected continent. In Sub-Saharan Africa, 22 countries are mine-affected. (Note that this excludes the Maghreb/North Africa, a sub-region comprising 7 countries and where there have been conflicts ranging from two World Wars to more recent and localized conflicts in which anti -personnel mines are known to have been used). Compare this to some 15 countries in Asia, 11 in Europe, and 9 in Latin America.

Casualty figures for individual countries are of course not very easy to obtain. Nevertheless it is clear that Africa is faced with an enormous challenge resulting from on the mine front. Paradoxically, it would seem that the amount of resources available to mine-affected countries in the continent for mine action is inversely proportional to the huge burden placed on them by the problem of mines.

c) Symbolism

The venue of the conference is located in Kenya and Africa. This is an important point. It means possibly amongst other things that world leaders will be gathering to address Convention matters right in the heart of the most affected region.

Expectations of Africa

Given this scenario, what then would the continent hope for?

- Firstly that the Nairobi rendez-vous in November really becomes what it is billed to be – a real **SUMMIT**. The most significant assembly of world leaders to address the question of landmines since the signing of the Convention.
- Secondly, that by virtue of its very high level, the meeting will come up with a strong political declaration and an equally concrete and well focused programme of action.
- Third, that the envisaged programme of action will take into consideration the priority areas for the continent as already elaborated above.

There are several other expectations of which I shall only highlight a few:

- Availability of adequate resources to assist African countries which require help.

There is a significant disparity between the level of the mine problem in Africa, and the amount of resources devoted to the region. Some of the mine – affected States in the continent are among the world’s weakest economies.

- Integration of mine action into the process of socio-economic development to render it more effective.
- The engagement of non-State actors so as to commit them to respect the spirit and letter of the Convention.
- Strengthening of regional and sub-regional cooperation on Convention issues.
- Implementation of comprehensive solutions to armed conflicts notably by addressing their root causes including issues relating to democracy and human rights.

African countries are currently working on a common position in the form of a declaration for the Summit. Hopefully this will be concluded shortly. The declaration will provide a comprehensive insight into Africa’s expectations of the Nairobi Summit on a Mine-Free World.