

**Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention
on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling,
Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel
Mines and on Their Destruction**

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Item 11 of the provisional agenda
Consideration of requests submitted under article 5

**Request for an extension of the deadline for
completing the destruction of anti-personnel mines
in accordance with article 5 of the Convention**

Summary

Submitted by Mauritania

1. The north of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania is contaminated by anti-personnel mines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) as a result of its involvement in the 1975–1978 Western Sahara conflict, which was marked by indiscriminate mining and the use of huge numbers of mines, generally without any plan of how they were laid.
2. Forty-seven years after the war, mines continue to kill and maim people, they impede development in northern Mauritania and block economic activities such as grazing, mining exploration, fishing, tourism and trade.
3. In 2000, the National Programme for Humanitarian Demining for Development was set up in response to this situation, as a government institution under the Ministry of the Interior and Decentralization. It is monitored by an interministerial steering committee, which is the body responsible for implementation of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention and coordinates all actions in this field.
4. Thus, 21 years after the Convention came into force, and in line with its article 5, Mauritania has managed to put huge effort into conducting demining operations to clear contaminated areas.
5. Over this period and thanks to the support of the international community, particularly Norway, a total area of 130,682,325 square metres has been treated and 8,078 anti-personnel mines, 890 anti-tank mines and 14,960 ERW have been destroyed.
6. The demining operations have made it possible for the local population to move about freely and, notably, for drilling and prospecting to take place, pasture to be accessed and other activities to be conducted. They have also made it possible to develop plans for the expansion of Nouadhibou, the country's economic capital.
7. On 29 November 2018, at the Seventeenth Meeting of the States Parties, Mauritania declared that it had fulfilled its obligations under article 5.
8. New contaminated areas have been discovered in Dakhlet Nouadhibou, Tiris Zemmour and Adrar *wilayas* during survey operations conducted by the National Programme for Humanitarian Demining for Development. In total, there are 10 areas of confirmed minefields covering 4,710,666.248 square metres and 4 areas covering 3,375,000



square metres where there are suspected minefields. These anti-personnel minefields were discovered by means of non-technical surveys carried out after reports were received from shepherds, nomads and fisherfolk and later confirmed by teams from the National Programme and foreign experts.

9. In the interests of meeting its commitments under the Convention, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania requests a one-year extension until 31 January 2022 to allow it to draw up a workplan and to strengthen the structures of the National Programme for Humanitarian Demining for Development. Mauritania plans to carry out a vast survey operation to ascertain the extent of contamination in the areas concerned and possibly discover other as yet unknown areas, continuing its efforts to bring more clarity to the situation, if the areas in question are on Mauritanian territory. In that case, Mauritania will implement an action plan to clear and destroy all mines in the contaminated areas. In short, Mauritania will remain committed to dealing with any residual contamination and will assist all victims of anti-personnel mines in its territory. These operations will be carried out by teams from the National Programme for Humanitarian Demining for Development, in collaboration with the Norwegian non-governmental organization, Norwegian People's Aid (NPA).

10. Surveys in Mauritania follow two procedures that are clearly defined in the Mauritanian Mine Action Standards. These are non-technical surveys (Mauritanian Mine Action Standard 6) and technical surveys (Mauritanian Mine Action Standard 07). These national standards have been produced with the support of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining and in partnership with all the operators involved in mine action, including NPA. Deminers involved in mine clearance in Mauritania are trained in manual demining (excavation and using detectors).

11. The support of bilateral and multilateral partners will be invaluable to Mauritania in guaranteeing the implementation of article 5 of the Convention. Bearing in mind the difficulties in the area, there will also be a need for cutting-edge technological equipment, protective gear, mine detection equipment, vehicles and capacity-building for the National Programme.

12. The total budget for the planned activities is US\$ 5,500,000, of which US\$ 3,000,000 will be provided by the National Programme from the national budget over five years, while US\$ 2,500,500 is yet to be sourced. Mauritania does not have many resources, but the political will it is demonstrating by contributing 54 per cent of the cost of the programme, both financially and in kind, is a major achievement.

13. Through the National Programme for Humanitarian Demining for Development, the Mauritanian Government has provided the following support since the start of the demining operations: demining teams and expertise, costs for the deminers, equipment, a protection team for the deminers, support vehicles, the setting up of regional offices, assistance for victims and logistical support commensurate with availability and capacity.

14. The National Programme has recently requested assistance from NPA, an organization that had previously supported demining operations, and a mission is being planned with the participation of the Implementation Support Unit for the Convention as well, once circumstances permit.

15. The mission should make it possible to collect additional information on the contamination and to develop an effective plan for the implementation of obligations, but unfortunately the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) situation has so far prevented this being done.

16. The National Programme is still seeking funding to finalize the workplan for the demining in the north of the country; it must be pointed out that, without support from partners, it will be practically impossible to clear those sites. It is in this context that Mauritania is requesting this extension.