

Mozambique: Demining in Mozambique to Continue Until 2014

Maputo — It is no longer possible to finish clearing land mines from Mozambican soil this year, as originally hoped, because of the discovery of further mined areas, reports Monday's issue of the Maputo daily "Noticias".

The new areas identified in 2008 cover 12 million square metres. Mozambique currently has the capacity to demine only two million square metres a year. So the newly identified areas alone would take six years to clear.

Faced with this problem, Mozambique was obliged, under the Ottawa Treaty outlawing anti-personnel landmines, to request an extension of its demining period. The request was made in December, and accepted by the co-signatories of the treaty. Mozambique now has up until 2014 to complete the demining work.

According to Fernando Mulima, of the Studies, Planning and Information Department of the National Demining Institute (IND), only in the four provinces north of the Zambezi - Cabo Delgado, Niassa, Nampula and Zambezia - has demining been completed. The newly identified mined areas are scattered around the other six provinces in the centre and south of the country

The problem is that, as further research continues, the demining teams may come across other mined areas. Some of the minefields are very old - thus many of the mines removed in Cabo Delgado were sown by the Portuguese colonial army prior to the country's independence in 1975. The demining work is also hindered by the lack of any maps of minefields - at the end of the war of destabilisation in 1992, nobody handed over any such maps.

According to Mulima, the southern province of Inhambane has the largest number of known mined areas - 251 areas covering 3.7 million square metres. Sofala, Gaza, Manica and Maputo provinces also have severe land mine problems.

The IND's target for this year is to demine 82 areas, corresponding to two million square metres. Its other priorities include assistance for land mine victims, and continued training of civic education agents whose task is to warn communities of the danger of mines.

Mulima said that in 2008 only three land mine accidents, with seven victims, were recorded. The previous year there were 11 accidents with 24 victims.

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