

MAURITANIA



ARTICLE 5 DEADLINE: 1 JANUARY 2021
 (UNCLEAR WHETHER ON TRACK TO MEET DEADLINE)

PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE	For 2015	For 2014
Problem understood	6	8
Target date for completion of mine clearance	4	5
Targeted clearance	8	8
Efficient clearance	8	8
National funding of programme	7	7
Timely clearance	5	5
Land release system in place	8	8
National mine action standards	8	8
Reporting on progress	5	5
Improving performance	6	6
PERFORMANCE SCORE	6.5	6.8

PERFORMANCE COMMENTARY

Mauritania declared it had completed clearance of all known anti-personnel mine contamination in 2015 under its initial Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC) Article 5 extension, which expired on 1 January 2016. But contamination may still exist along Mauritania's northern border with Western Sahara. Mauritania was granted a second extension period until 2021 to clarify the demarcation of the border and the location of the mined areas and clear them; however, there was no indication of any action towards this end in 2015 or the first half of 2016.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- Mauritania should initiate dialogue and actively engage with Morocco and stakeholders in the Western Sahara conflict to clarify the location of remaining mined areas and the demarcation of its northern border.
- If necessary, Mauritania should develop and implement an action plan to ensure the clearance of any remaining mines in accordance with its APMBC obligations.
- Mauritania should report regularly and in detail on its political efforts to obtain clarity on the border and on any mined areas it suspects may be on its territory.

CONTAMINATION

At the end of 2015, Mauritania reported it had released all known remaining anti-personnel mine contamination, totalling 40 areas with a size of nearly 67.1km², including 18 areas with a size of 64.8km² identified prior to 2010 and a further 22 areas covering 2.3km² identified in 2012–13.¹

At the start of 2015, the north of Mauritania had limited remaining mine contamination, a legacy of the conflict over Western Sahara in 1975–78. Only 1.7km² across 13 confirmed mined areas remained to be addressed, all in Dakhlet Nouadibou province.² During 2015, the programme's four demining teams were set to finish clearance activities in the remaining contaminated areas of Swaidyyat, Bolinwar, and Nouadibou.³

However, other contaminated areas exist near the border with Western Sahara and might be considered as outside of Mauritanian territory and thus not under its jurisdiction.⁴ In its request for a second extension to its Article 5 clearance deadline, Mauritania stated that

it "suspects that the security system along the border with Western Sahara, which comprises fortifications and minefields, crosses Mauritanian territory, especially since there is no natural border [between the two countries]."⁵

A 2006 Landmine Impact Survey (LIS) had found a total of 65 suspected hazardous areas (SHAs) covering 76km² and affecting 60 communities. This represented a significant exaggeration of the actual mine threat. In 2010, Morocco provided detailed maps of minefields laid during the Western Sahara conflict. The minefields had been partially cleared using military procedures prior to the entry into force of the APMBC.⁶

The last reported mine casualties were in 2012 when one person was killed and three others were injured.⁷

1 Analysis of Mauritania's Second APMBC Article 5 deadline Extension Request submitted by the Committee on Article 5 Implementation to the 14th Meeting of States Parties, 17 November 2015, p. 2.

2 Emails from Aliouneould Menane, National Coordinator, National Humanitarian Demining Programme for Development (PNDHD), 1 September 2016; and Melissa Andersson, former Country Director, Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) Mauritania, 10 September 2015.

3 Email from Melissa Andersson, NPA Mauritania, 10 September 2015.

4 Ibid., 21 April 2014.

5 Article 5 deadline Extension Request, 2 April 2015, p. 4. In the original French: "nous suspectons que le dispositif de sécurité le long de la frontière avec le Sahara occidental, composé de fortification et champs de mines interfère en territoire Mauritanien surtout qu'il n'existe aucune frontière naturelle."

6 Revised Second Article 5 deadline Extension Request, 6 September 2010, p. 3; and email from Melissa Andersson, NPA, 17 September 2015.

7 Analysis of Mauritania's Second Article 5 deadline Extension Request submitted by the Committee on Article 5 Implementation to the APMBC 14th Meeting of States Parties, 17 November 2015, p. 2.

PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT

The National Humanitarian Demining Programme for Development (Programme National de Déminage Humanitaire pour le Développement, PNDHD) coordinates mine action operations in Mauritania.⁸ Since 2007, the programme has been the responsibility of the Ministry of Interior and Decentralization, with oversight from an interministerial steering committee.⁹ The PNDHD has its headquarters in the capital, Nouakchott, and a regional mine action centre (RMAC) in Nouadhibou.

Strategic Planning

Mauritania's extension request included a detailed workplan for 2010–15, containing annual milestones of area to be released each year and against which progress could be compared. By the end of 2011, operations were due to be completed in the provinces of Tiris Zemour and Adrar. This was finally achieved in 2013.

According to Mauritania, in the four years since January 2011 (the beginning of its first extension period), the programme released all 18 areas that were the subject of the extension covering 64.8km² and with the destruction of 587 anti-personnel mines, 244 anti-vehicle mines, and 5,179 items of unexploded ordnance (UXO) or abandoned explosive ordnance. A further 22 contaminated areas were identified during a PNDHD survey conducted with Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), mainly in Dakhlet Nouadhibou et Adrar provinces, of which 2.29km² were released, with the destruction of 123 anti-personnel mines, 225 anti-vehicle mines, and 4 explosive remnants of war (ERW).¹⁰

Strategic Planning

In September 2016, Mauritania stated it was developing a new mine action strategic plan for 2016–20, which will focus on residual contamination, risk education, and victim assistance, and also include a new component on small arms.¹¹

Standards

National mine action standards based on the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) were in force in 2015.¹² In September 2016, Mauritania stated that it was looking to revise the standards with the support of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining.¹³

Operators

In accordance with a 2006 decree, all clearance activities have been conducted by the Army Engineer Corps operating under PNDHD. In March 2011, NPA signed a memorandum of understanding with Mauritania to provide support for mine and battle area clearance (BAC) in the country. NPA subsequently worked in Mauritania both as an operator and in a capacity-building role as a technical advisor for PNDHD, as of 2015. Under a joint workplan for clearance in 2015 agreed between PNDHD, the Engineer Corps, and NPA, a total of four teams of 28 deminers were deployed to the field in 2015, plus operational support staff.¹⁴

Information Management

The national mine action database is held at the PNDHD. The database was cleaned of inflated figures at the end of 2013.¹⁵ NPA reported that additional efforts were made in 2015 to improve the quality of data to ensure all information had been accurately recorded before the joint NPA/PNDHD/Engineer Corps project ended in December 2015.¹⁶

Quality Management

In 2015, the PNDHD reported carrying out three quality assurance (QA) and quality control (QC) missions on field tasks.¹⁷ NPA confirmed QA/QC was conducted on a regular basis by two PNDHD QA officers assigned to monitor the quality of ongoing clearance by the Engineer Corps, and that external QA was also conducted by PNDHD at the end of each clearance task.¹⁸

8 Decree No. 1960/MDAT/MDN establishing the PNDHD, 14 August 2007.

9 Decree No. 001358/MDAT establishing the Steering Committee of the PNDHD, 3 September 2007.

10 Second APMB Article 5 deadline Extension Request, 2 April 2015, p. 5.

11 Email from Aliouneould Menane, PNDHD, 1 September 2016.

12 Email from Melissa Andersson, NPA, 17 September 2015.

13 Email from Aliouneould Menane, PNDHD, 1 September 2016.

14 Emails from Aliouneould Menane, PNDHD, 1 September 2016; and Melissa Andersson, NPA, 12 September 2016.

15 Response to questionnaire by Melissa Andersson, NPA, 10 September 2015.

16 Email from Melissa Andersson, NPA, 12 September 2016.

17 Email from Aliouneould Menane, PNDHD, 1 September 2016.

18 Email from Melissa Andersson, NPA, 12 September 2016.

LAND RELEASE

Mauritania completed clearance of all known remaining areas of anti-personnel mine contamination in November 2015. The PNDHD has reported that seven mined areas with a total size of 2.95km² were released in 2015 and a total of 35 anti-personnel mines and 47 anti-vehicle mines destroyed.¹⁹

Survey in 2015

According to NPA, it reduced by technical survey a total of 1,608,317m² in 2015. The last survey, completed in January 2014, cancelled 22 SHAs covering almost 27.5km², while confirming another 27 SHAs as mined over a total area of 1.7km².²⁰

Clearance in 2015

According to NPA, six confirmed mined areas with a total size of 351,473m² were cleared in Dakhlet Nouadibou province in 2015, with the destruction of 34 anti-personnel mines and 25 anti-vehicle mines.²¹ Previously, in 2014, NPA reported clearance of 0.72km², with the destruction of 59 anti-personnel mines, 26 anti-vehicle mines, and 13 items of UXO.²²

NPA reported that the decrease in the amount of area cleared in 2015 compared to 2014 was due to the completion of clearance in November 2015 and rotating two sets of deminers during the year, which decreased overall productivity but enabled new deminers to increase their productivity rates and gain experience with a view to creating sufficient national capacity to address any residual contamination. The decrease in the number of mines found in 2015 was also due to the fact that the areas addressed towards the end of the programme had previously been subjected to some military clearance; however, as the quality of that clearance could not be guaranteed, it was necessary to re-clear the areas to ensure international standards had been met.²³

ARTICLE 5 COMPLIANCE

At the Fourteenth Meeting of States Parties in December 2015, Mauritania was granted a second extension to its Article 5 mine clearance deadline to destroy all anti-personnel mines in mined areas under its jurisdiction or control as soon as possible, for a period of five years until 1 January 2021.

Mauritania's previous Article 5 deadline was set to expire on 1 January 2016 under its first extension request submitted in 2010. It was not on track to meet this deadline and requested a second five-year extension in April 2015.

In its first extension request, Mauritania explained that the reasons for its inability to meet its deadline were lack of financial resources, insufficient progress in demining, use of only manual clearance, and difficult soil and climatic factors.²⁴ Mauritania stated that it had a "coherent plan" that combined land release by survey and clearance and that it hoped to involve international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in its demining programme.²⁵ NPA was subsequently invited to establish a mine action programme in 2011.

In May 2013, Mauritania said it was fully committed to achieving the objectives of its extension, noting that only lack of funding could impede timely fulfilment of its workplan.²⁶ In April 2015, however, Mauritania submitted a request for a second extension of its deadline, for a further five years through to 1 January 2021, despite being on track to complete clearance of all known anti-personnel mine contamination by the end of the year. Under the five-year extension period, the Mauritanian government would enter into a dialogue with "all of the stakeholders in the Western Sahara conflict so as to be in a position to clarify the status of the suspected areas".²⁷

19 Email from Aliouneould Menane, PNDHD, 25 October 2016. NPA's figures for its operations were just under 2km² released. Email from Melissa Andersson, NPA, 12 September 2016.

20 Response to questionnaire by Melissa Andersson, NPA, 10 September 2015; and email, 17 September 2015.

21 Email from Melissa Andersson, NPA, 12 September 2016.

22 Response to questionnaire by Melissa Andersson, NPA, 10 September 2015.

23 Email from Melissa Andersson, NPA, 12 September 2016.

24 Article 5 deadline Extension Request, 3 February 2010, pp. 3–4.

25 Statement of Mauritania, APMBC Intersessional Meetings (Standing Committee on Mine Action), Geneva, 23 June 2010.

26 Ibid., 27 May 2013. Notes by ICBL.

27 Second APMBC Article 5 deadline Extension Request, 2 April 2015, p. 4.

In the second extension request, Mauritania further undertook to initiate and maintain dialogue with stakeholders with the aim of acquiring relevant topographic and cartographic information to determine the exact location of its northern border and to develop plans to address any areas identified within its jurisdiction.²⁸ Specifically it pledged to:

- Conduct a survey and mapping exercise of the northern border
- Maintain dialogue with stakeholders in the Western Sahara conflict to find a solution to clarifying the problem
- Develop and implement an action plan to address any contaminated areas if necessary
- Inform the states parties of progress at the annual meetings and through Article 7 reports; and
- Maintain PNDHD and operational demining units for residual clearance and risk education.

The second extension request, however, lacked detail and timelines on these future actions.

In June 2015, the PNDHD informed states parties to the APMBC that it had requested that an interministerial committee be formed to support efforts to gain clarity on the location of remaining mined areas and the northern border. Mauritania was called on to provide information on the establishment, mandate, activities, and results of this interministerial committee to states parties by 30 April 2016.²⁹

In May 2016, at the APMBC's intersessional meetings, Mauritania reiterated its commitments under the extension request, but did not report on any progress towards initiating a dialogue with relevant stakeholders or towards defining the border and identifying the location of the mined areas. It stated that if circumstances had not changed after the five years granted under its latest extension request, Mauritania would use its right to request a third extension.³⁰

In September 2016, the PNDHD informed Mine Action Review that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the focal point to address matters concerning clarification of the border areas and that as an interministerial committee already supervises the PNDHD, there "is no need to create a new body" to support efforts to obtain clarity on the border. It stated that relevant topographic data would be collected in "a joint process", but did not elaborate on any concrete steps or progress towards this end. If further contamination within Mauritania's jurisdiction is determined, the PNDHD and the Ministry of Interior and Decentralization will be responsible for drawing up a plan to address any remaining mined areas, it said.³¹

The PNDHD reported that US\$650,000 was provided by the government of Mauritania to cover the cost of mine action activities in 2015.³² It confirmed that the management staff of the PNDHD, along with its QA/QC team, had been retained and that eight teams of deminers were available from the Engineer Corps, amounting to some 60 persons who have already received training and have some practical mine clearance experience and whose capacity will be available to draw on to address any residual contamination.³³ In 2016, the national government was continuing to fund the PNDHD.³⁴

While the demarcation of the border is closely linked to the resolution of the dispute between Morocco and Western Sahara, success will ultimately depend on sufficient political will and timely effort from Mauritania, as well as from other parties involved.

28 Decision on the request submitted by Mauritania for a Second Article 5 deadline Extension Request, 4 December 2015.

29 Analysis of Mauritania's Second Article 5 deadline Extension Request submitted by the Committee on Article 5 Implementation to the Fourteenth Meeting of States Parties, 17 November 2015, p. 3.

30 Statement of Mauritania, APMBC Intersessional Meetings (Standing Committee on Article 5 Implementation), Geneva, 19–20 May 2016. Unofficial translation from Arabic.

31 Email from Aliouneould Menane, PNDHD, 1 September 2016.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.; and email from Melissa Andersson, NPA, 12 September 2016.

34 Email from Melissa Andersson, NPA, 12 September 2016.