
**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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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**

Executive summary

Submitted by Algeria

1. Like other countries around the world, Algeria has repeatedly been the scene of fighting throughout its history. The presence of anti-personnel mines and other explosive remnants of war such as bombs, shells, grenades and various types of ordnance dates back to the colonial conflict with France. The first experimental system of barbed wire perimeter fences, initially mined and then electrified, was put up along the border with Morocco in 1956. From then on, anti-personnel mines were widely used throughout the country, both as a conventional defensive weapon to protect military camps, bases and other sensitive points, such as certain routes and combat zones, and also intensively, as part of the border closure strategy where, continuous barriers were erected as the main active obstacle along the borders with Tunisia and Morocco to keep units of the National Liberation Army from moving into the country's interior. In addition, 1994 and 1995, in its counter-terrorism operations, the Algerian army used mines as a passive protection measure around certain sensitive sites (high-voltage pylons) in some areas of the north.

2. The impacted communities are those in the border regions, which is where the highest density of anti-personnel mine contamination has been identified (4–6 mines per square metre, i.e. 1.3 per head of the population of Algeria in 1962, with 11 mines per head in the border *wilayas* (governorates). These border barriers are said to contain 10,883,300 anti-personnel mines. The mine-infested *wilayas* through which these barriers pass are El Tarf, Souk Ahras, Guelma and Tébessa in the east, and Tlemcen, Naâma and Béchar in the west. These *wilayas* cover a total area of 227,419 square kilometres and, according to the general housing and population census of March 2008, have 3,335,144 inhabitants, almost one tenth of the total population of the country.

3. The impact of the mines on these people and their environment makes itself felt in various ways. At the human level, there is a large number of victims of anti-personnel mines, and they remain traumatized and/or disabled, overloading the country's health and

social welfare systems, with their disabilities at the community level leading to vulnerability and a spiral of poverty both for victims and their families. In terms of economic development, the contamination has clearly deprived whole sections of the country of the benefits of development, as the presence of mines has crippled both private and public initiative. Development has only been possible on properly cleared land, and only as clearance operations have gradually progressed. In other areas, there is still a noxious environment, with the inhabitants having to contend with these deadly and destructive devices on a daily basis. At the environmental level, the destruction of plants and wildlife by poachers using explosives from mines taken from the minefields has been noted, along with damage to certain protected sites of global significance. These include El Kala park, which is on the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance, and the Tiout and Moghrar oases, where some protected animal species are under particular threat, such as the Barbary deer in El Tarf and Souk Ahras and the bustard in Naâma.

4. In the initial phase of anti-personnel mine clearance, which was carried out continuously from 1963 to 1988, the soldiers assigned to the task, despite a lack of specialized training, dismantled 1,482 kilometres of mine belt out of a total of 2,531, recovered and destroyed 7,819,120 mines and cleared 50,006 hectares of land. They used mechanical demining methods where possible and manual methods in less accessible areas. The procedures in use at the time involved conventional combat engineering techniques.

5. When demining activities ceased at the end of this first phase, the areas were empirically broken down through a review process into sectors which had been fully demined, those requiring further clearance, areas which were still mined, two historic sites consisting of two sections of the Challe Line, which were left untouched for commemorative and educational purposes and areas mined by the Algerian army as part of the war against terrorism. Algeria will also dismantle the two historic sections of the Challe Line to recover the mines and produce replicas.

6. Currently, 2,329 disabled persons, 472 widows and 725 ascendants of victims benefit from a legal mechanism that provides support to victims of explosive devices dating from the colonial era; it was established in 1974, with retroactive effect to 5 July 1962, the official date of Algerian independence. Of these persons, a total of 1,765 victims of anti-personnel mines were registered in the border *wilayas* mentioned above between 1962 and 2007; this averages out at 50 victims a year.

7. Algeria became a party to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction in 2002. Between 2000 and 2007, the 15 sites mined by the Algerian army were cleared in six separate mine clearance operations, and the clearance of other areas under Algerian sovereignty where anti-personnel mines were known or suspected to be located officially resumed on 27 November 2004. Since then, at a rate of recovery and destruction of over 7,150 anti-personnel mines a month, Algeria has fulfilled its obligations under article 5 in the *wilaya* of Béchar on its south-western border. The clearance operation in Béchar was completed on 16 February 2011: 286,319 anti-personnel mines and 311 flare mines were discovered and destroyed in the operation and 3,911.4 hectares of cleared land was returned to the municipal authorities of Boukais, Moughel, Lahmar, Béchar and Béni Ounif. The clearance operation on the south-western border achieved 100 per cent of initial projections. On the other hand, on the eastern and north-western borders, the clearance targets have only been partially achieved. A handover certificate was issued on 25 August 2011 to the municipality of Djenien Bourezg, in the *wilaya* of Naâma; 76 hectares were decontaminated.

8. On the eastern border, five municipalities in the *wilaya* of El Tarf, nine of Tébessa and one in Souk Ahras have been fully cleared; 436,394 kilometres of mine strips and 950,376 hectares of land have been cleared, with the discovery and destruction of 63,177

anti-personnel mines, 1,605 flare mines and 144 shells. Demining units are now deployed in areas suspected to be mined in 10 municipalities in the *wilaya* of El Tarf, 9 in the Souk Ahras, 3 in Guelma and 9 in Tébessa, with the aim of clearing 310 kilometres of strips suspected to be mined and 620 hectares of land. The clearance operation on the eastern border, which began in December 2007, has now exceeded 35 per cent of initial projections. A handover certificate was issued on 12 September 2011 to the municipality of Souk Ahras, where nearly 40 hectares had been cleared (39.90 hectares).

9. On the north-west border the clearance targets were met in the town of Djenien Bourezg, where 79.2 kilometres of mine strips were cleared, 81,087 mines recovered and destroyed and 419 hectares of land made available, and along the railway running north to south through the *wilaya* of Naâma, from Mécheria to Oued Lakhdar, where 26,940 anti-personnel mines were recovered and destroyed. The latter project was ordered in support of the special economic recovery programme (PSRE), which aimed to upgrade the Mécheria-Béchar railway line to standard gauge over a distance of 360 kilometres. This line runs for 183 kilometres through the *wilaya* of Naâma (100 kilometres from Mécheria to Ain Sefra, 60 from Ain Sefra to Moghrar and 23 from Moghrar to Oued Lakhdar). Work on the project began on 3 January 2005 and was completed on 30 April 2008; the line is now open. The clearance operation at the north-west border, which began on 27 November 2004, has achieved 71.54 per cent of initial projections. Mine clearance units are now working to clear 736,235 hectares in areas suspected of being mined in the *wilayas* of Tlemcen and Naâma. A new 8 kilometre mine belt discovered on 13 June 2011 was recently cleared with the removal of 2,387 mines.

10. Algeria was carrying out humanitarian demining long before such activities began at international level. Soon after the end of the War of National Liberation, the Government of Algeria assigned the task of removing mines and other explosive remnants of war, considered under the Constitution to be “the vestiges of colonialism”, to three ministerial departments: those dealing with defence, health and the Mujahideen (war veterans). Following the entry into force for Algeria of the Convention, a focal point for action against anti-personnel mines, the Inter-ministerial Committee for the Implementation of the Convention, was established by presidential decree on 8 May 2003 and began operating on 5 September 2004. Chaired by the Ministry of National Defence, it is made up of representatives of the ministries directly concerned by the problem of anti-personnel mines, including, in addition to the ministries of National Defence and Health and Hospital Reform and the Ministry for Moudjahidine, the ministries of the Interior and Local Communities, Foreign Affairs, Communication and National Solidarity, Families and National Community Abroad.

11. Monitoring of all clearance operations is carried out by quality control inspectors trained in the use of the International Mine Action Standards. The monitoring is carried out in the course of operations without prior warning, and also systematically at the end of each decontamination operation in areas being cleared or re-cleared. The use of quality control and assurance norms has made it possible to restore decontaminated land in accordance with established standards.

12. Despite all its efforts, past and present, Algeria has not been able to achieve the targets set for the deadline of April 2012 in line with its international commitments, due to: (a) the extent of contamination; (b) the delayed start to clearance operations (27 November 2004) owing to the need to update and confirm the data on mined areas and areas suspected to be mined. The initial 10-year period was thereby effectively reduced by two and a half years, a quarter of the time theoretically prescribed; (c) the exclusive use of manual demining methods, which are known to be effective, but slow, and hence to have a low yield. This option was chosen on the one hand because of previous experience with mechanical methods, which did not prove totally reliable (the areas thus cleared still

contained mines) and on the other hand because of the nature of the terrain, whether uneven (in mountainous areas) or specific (e.g. wetlands of global importance), and the nature of the soil (e.g. sandy, as at the Tiout oasis, or rocky, as at Moghrar, where “carrot mines” were anchored to the rock itself); (d) the expansion of the minefield boundaries, as a precautionary measure, due to the displacement of some mines from their original positions; and (e) the influence of the weather on working conditions, which on occasion can slow down operations.

13. To allow it to meet its obligations under article 5, Algeria requires a five-year extension of its deadline (April 2012–April 2017). According to consultations on the ground and realistic projections based on such information, 43 zones, 31 in the east and 12 in the west, can be cleared in this time. The extension period was arrived at by calculating a ratio for the whole country on the basis of a hypothetical terrain with a maximum number of physical difficulties (i.e., relief, climate and environment) and a reasonable estimate of their combined effect. It is also based on the experience of the units deployed since 27 November 2004 for the implementation of article 5.

14. During the extension period, Algeria will demine areas suspected to be mined in the east, in 10 municipalities in the *wilaya* of El Tarf, 9 in Souk Ahras, 3 in Guelma and 9 in Tébessa, with the aim of clearing 310 kilometres of strips suspected to be mined and handing over 620 hectares of land. In the west, demining units will continue their work in areas suspected to be mined in the *wilayas* of Tlemcen and Naâma, with the aim of clearing 736,235 hectares.

15. Implementation during this extension will be carried out at the sole expense of the Algerian State.
