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## **UNOAU SRSG SPEECH**

### **Opening Address**

**International Mine Awareness Day 4 April 2013**

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In many countries in Africa the sound of guns may have faded and the soldiers may have returned to their barracks, but for many communities, the war continues, as Landmines and Explosive Remnants of War (ERW), including cluster bombs, kill and maim thousands of innocent civilians each year. In addition to the unspeakable physical and psychological effects on innocent victims, these indiscriminate weapons of war prevent local communities from accessing their land; they hamper income generation and reconstruction efforts just when they are needed most; and with every tragic accident, they serve as a continuing reminder of the former conflict, jeopardising what is often still a fragile peace.

However, much has been done by the African Union, its member states, International Partners, and local NGOs, with the vital support of donors. I commend the AU Commission, in particular the work of the Defence and Security Division and Peace Support Operations Division, for their relentless efforts and achievements to date. A

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shining example of this work is the rapid establishment, in cooperation with the United Nations Office to the African Union and the United Nations Mine Action Service, of the Mine Action Office in Mali in support of the critical work of AFISMA, the Malian Defence and Security Forces (MDSF) and humanitarian agencies. This co-operation has already led to Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) and Explosive Safety training for AFISMA, MDSF and UN personnel deployed in Mali thanks to funding support from the Governments of the USA, the UK, France and Estonia. I am also very happy to report that the Government of Japan recently announced the generous donation of over 20 million USD for Humanitarian Mine Action activities in Africa, including support to the countries of South Sudan, Somalia, Libya, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Mali.

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

These continued efforts move us closer to the vision of an Africa free of the threat of landmines and Explosive Remnants of War. In acknowledging the importance of Mine Action activities in efforts towards sustainable and lasting peace and development, recognition and gratitude must go to the brave men and women deminers, who, on a daily basis, put their lives at risk for the benefit of others, often working in hot, dusty and dangerous conditions, away from home and families.

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Credit must also be given to National Mine Action Authorities and the UN Mine Action Service who together, continue to co-coordinate the global fight against landmines, with the support of other Mine Action stakeholders, such as UNDP, UNICEF, ICRC, and numerous other Implementing Partners.

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Effective Mine Action will benefit the poorest of the poor; it makes an immediate impact, promoting reconstruction and peace. I commend the vital work of the AU Commission in this important area, and reaffirm my commitment to work to enhance partnerships between the AU, the UN family and partners in support of these noble endeavors *'to free Africa from landmines'*.