African people affected by landmines are anxiously waiting for a determined common African action on landmines.

Addis Ababa: "The expectations of this conference are high, as Africans and mine-affected people are waiting anxiously for a determined African action on landmines that will effectively help their plight for a better future," AU commissioner for peace and security, Said Djinit, told participants of the conference. "It is my hope that the conference will rise up to this expectation and that it will provide an opportunity to harness our determination to act collectively and decisively in our campaign to eliminate landmines," Djinit said. The four-day meeting, brings together experts from AU member states to draw a common African position to prohibit production, stockpiling, use and destruction of landmines before the international conference on landmines to be held in Nairobi, Kenya, next November. "We have to prepare ourselves as Africans to make of the Nairobi Conference a difference in our struggle for a world free of landmines," Djinit added. He pointed out that although the first continental conference of experts on landmines in South Africa in May 1997 laid clear guidelines, benchmarks and indicators to tackle the scourge of landmines in Africa, the challenges posed by landmines in the continent remains daunting. "We have seen innocent people, women and children amputated, lose their limbs and other vital parts of their bodies and have had to be handicapped for life," Djinit said. "Africa has also seen landmines destroying healthy and productive part of the population, destroying fertile land for agriculture, destroying transport networks and destroying important natural resources," he said. "The position of the AU on landmines is clear and it has been at the forefront of the campaign against landmines," he added. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said in a message that the international community recognized the humanitarian, human rights and developmental impact of landmines on families, men, women and children in many areas of Africa, and pledged full UN backing for AU efforts to clear Africa of landmines. At the Nairobi summit, world leaders will review commitments to end the suffering caused by anti-personnel mines and adopt an action plan to ensure the effective application of the Ottawa Convention between 2005 and 2009.

To date, 143 states, including 48 from Africa, have signed the Ottawa Convention.

Von: AFP text, Media Corp News - Channel New Asia.com