Uganda destroys landmine stockpiles (Uganda)

Kampala (Uganda) - Vice-President Gilbert Bukenya on Monday witnessed the destruction of anti-personnel land-mines at Kigo Prison off Entebbe road. The exercise funded by the Canadian government, among other donors, is in compliance with the Ottawa Mines Ban Treaty 1997, which Uganda ratified two years later.

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As the vice-president said at the ceremony, land-mines are costly in terms of lives. Because they are relatively cheap to produce and easy to deploy, anti-personnel mines have been widely used in many African conflicts, including Uganda; killing and maiming their victims in huge numbers. Vast tracts of arable land have been laid to waste, while formerly able-bodied men and women have been rendered unproductive after losing limbs to these cruel weapons. On top of that, clearing minefields is an extremely expensive exercise, as the cost of detonating a single land-mine could be more than its market price! It is commendable that the government has chosen this path.

Unfortunately, it has no control over land-mines in the hands of rebels who continue to plant them indiscriminately in the areas they traverse. We, however, hope that the destruction of the stockpiles in the government arsenal will deny the rebels a vital source of the weapons. In addition, we expect our neighbours to cooperate and deny the rebels operating in their countries any access to their stockpiles. But the campaign should not end with anti-personnel mines. This region is full of small arms and light weapons that fuel conflicts, and Uganda would do well to show the way by eliminating the bulk of them.

It would appear that the stability of Uganda, and the region, hinges on demilitarization, not armament. If countries in the region were to learn to resolve conflicts peacefully, we would free vital resources for social services and thus empower our people economically.

The best way to guard against the use of landmines is to avoid conflicts. One of the ways to do this is demilitarizing our politics as well.

This is because countries with armies involved in politics, such as Uganda and Rwanda, also have a higher risk of degenerating into anarchy, than say Kenya and Tanzania.

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