

CARTAGENA SUMMIT ON A MINE FREE WORLD

THE HIGH LEVEL SEGMENT **ZIMBABWE STATEMENT**

BY BRIGADIER GENERAL TARUMBWA ON BEHALF OF THE
HONOURABLE MINISTER OF DEFENCE
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INTRODUCTION

Madam President, your excellences dear colleagues ladies and gentlemen warm greetings from the people of Zimbabwe.

On behalf of the government and people of Zimbabwe, I would like to express our warm appreciation to Colombia for hosting this important Summit and of course the hospitality of its people especially those of this beautiful town of Cartagena.

We recognize that Colombia like my country is badly affected by landmines emplaced by people and organizations who perpetrate illegal activities.

I would like to extend Zimbabwe's gratitude to Norway for its role as president of this Summit and for its historic leadership in the development of the Anti Personnel Mine Convention. In particular I want to extend my congratulations to Ambassador Eckey for guiding this Second Review Conference of the Anti Personnel Mine Ban Treaty in a highly proficient manner. Norway is one of the countries the people of Zimbabwe hold in very high regard considering the role it played in our development since independence.

Zimbabwe is one of the first countries to sign the Anti Personnel Ban Convention and our commitment to its full implementation has never been in doubt. We share with the international community in its efforts to rid the world of mines and cluster bombs. As I speak we are in the process of depositing articles for the signing of the Cluster Convention, a process that will allow ratification and domesticating it into our statutes. I want to state here that Zimbabwe has joined those countries which advocate for the

elimination of cluster bombs just as it remains committed to a mine free world.

The landmine problem in Zimbabwe can be traced back to the war of liberation of Zimbabwe which culminated into the attainment of our independence in 1980. At the peak of the liberation struggle, the then illegal Smith Regime laid minefields along the Northern and Eastern borders of the country from 1976 – 1979 with the aim of preventing the infiltration of freedom fighters into the country from Zambia and Mozambique respectively. It is estimated that not less 3 000 000 buried and 200 000 above surface anti-personnel mines were laid in six distinct minefields with a total distance of 850km. While the majority of these minefields were marked several others were never marked while others need to be surveyed. There are also several remnants of war scattered countrywide. To date these minefields have killed over one thousand and five hundred people and tens of thousands of domestic and wild animals. As we speak right away two boys lost their limbs last week and are fighting for their lives in Karanda Hospital of Rushinga District Mashonaland East Province, one of the provinces heavily contaminated with anti – personnel mines.

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED

Madam President

As we are about to adopt the Cartagena Declaration and the Cartagena Plan of Action we have to look at the challenges that still lay ahead.

There is almost no international cooperation and assistance currently obtaining on the ground. The economic sanctions imposed on the country have not spared our capacity to address the landmine problem. Assistance from the USA and the EU was withdrawn in year 2000 at the peak of our land reform programme. This did not however stopped demining operations as the government continued on its own for the following seven years leading to the realizing of land in 2006.

The international community seems not ready to engage us at the moment. In year 2008 we submitted our equipment requests to UNDP after they allocated us US\$150 000. Despite the fact that some of the equipment has since been bought, UNDP, for reasons unknown to us, is saying that it is not

ready to deliver it to Zimbabwe Mine Action Centre. This equipment would have enabled us to resurvey our mined areas as we are still relying on 1994 surveys. As such the government has been left to fund the mine action activities by itself. This has resulted in the stalling of the progress, postponement of programmes and submission of request for extension of deadline to complete the clearance of mines in areas under jurisdiction and control. We requested for extension of the deadline and we were granted 22 months specifically for survey of newly discovered and resurvey of known minefields. This survey could not be conducted owing to the absence of survey equipment which is yet to be delivered by UNDP.

Demining operations are currently going on at a very slow pace at the Sango Border Post to Crooks Corner minefield due to inadequacy of the necessary resources that stems from lack of adequate funding. For the whole of 2008, only 3.6km of the minefield stretch was cleared and for 2009 we have only been able to open a gap at Sango Border Post for the expansion of the railway siding. Shortage of capital demining equipment such as vehicles and other logistical requirements has been our major setback. Judging from the current pace at which demining operations are taking place, without financial assistance from the donor and international community, demining operations in Zimbabwe will take not less than 30 years. However with adequate assistance being rendered, the country may take up to ten years to completely rid the country of this landmine menace.

Our Mine Action Centre has also encountered the challenge of failing to fulfill some of the pillars of mine action such as mine victim survey and mine victim assistance. Mine victim survey has basically been hampered by the remoteness of mine affected areas due to lack of reliable communication networks and lack of transport and other relevant equipment on our part. However had the UNDP released the allocated funds we could have commissioned a survey to determine the number of victims. We know that nine deaths and 24 injuries incurred since the 2004 Review Conference but this could be more. Another area that has not received enough of the attention that it deserves is Mine Risk Education. Whilst some Mine Risk Education sessions have been conducted through use of our teams in all affected provinces who managed to carry out Mine Risk Education campaigns during provincial agricultural shows and trade fairs, some of the people have not yet been reached.

It is our intention to transform the Zimbabwe Mine Action Centre from a largely military out fit to a civilian institution to allow free interaction with

the wider world without the restrictions which are inherent in any military organization. However this is proving very difficult owing to budgetary constraints resulting from the economic situation obtaining in my country. For as long as we do not get the necessary funding, it would be difficult for us to transform ZIMAC and our appeal to the donor community is to consider funding this exercise quickly to allow for unrestricted interaction with our mine action authority. We do not desire the currently set – up but it is the only feasible one for now.

Zimbabwe would want it put on record that it is on the aspect of assistance where we should accept our failure to fully meet the requirements of the convention as provided for under Article 6. We have an obligation as the international community and that obligation is provided for in the convention whose performance we are reviewing at this conference. It would be misleading to claim success when we have not been able to extend the much required assistance to one of the States Parties, no matter what the reasons could be.

CONCLUSION

Zimbabwe, as a State Party, has so far registered some relative degree of progress in fulfilling its obligations under this Convention by way of ensuring destruction of stockpiled anti-personnel mines, cooperation and assistance, landmine clearance and transparency. However challenges have also been encountered in the sphere of funding which came about as a result of the illegal imposition of sanctions on the country and the subsequent economic meltdown. This has culminated in the retardation and even stalling of progress in our quest to fulfill our obligations under the Convention. It is our hope that international community will be able to draw a line between political and humanitarian affairs so that Zimbabwe's mine action activities will start to receive the international support that we so dearly deserve. The people of Zimbabwe have suffered enough and it is high time the international community play its part to alleviate this suffering. It will be misleading for the world to claim success of the implementation of the Anti Personnel Mine Ban Convention when it denies one of its members support to easy suffering of its people.

Finally we want to lend our support to the Cartagena Declaration and Plan of Action which shall guide the implementation of the Convention for the next five years. I want to thank you madam President for a sterling job in presiding over this important conference and the Implementation Support

**Unit of the Geneva Center for Humanitarian Demining for its endless efforts
to assist States Parties**

I THANK YOU.

