

**ZIMBABWE'S UPDATE ON MINE CLEARANCE TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON MINE CLEARANCE, MINE RISK EDUCATION AND MINE ACTION TECHNOLOGIES; 10 MAY 2006**

Thank you Co Chairs for affording me the opportunity to give an update on progress achieved since the last Standing Committee Meetings. I am not going to talk about the whole background to our mine problem since this has been highlighted in previous Standing Committee and other Meetings. I will only give a brief update of progress achieved so far. Zimbabwe's deadline to destroy or ensure destruction of all mines in mined areas is 2009. To date, significant progress has been achieved, about 50% of the over 700 km of previously mined areas has been cleared. At the end of last year, we completed clearance of the 220km Victoria Falls to Mlibizi minefield that had started about 7 years ago. 25 959 mines were destroyed in the process, 6 959 of them were destroyed last year alone.

The completion of the operation was capped by a familiarisation visit to the cleared minefield by the State President in March this year. During the visit, the President did not only challenge the local authorities and communities to make maximum use of the cleared land for resettlement of displaced people, farming and for the development of infrastructure, but he also took the opportunity to reiterate his government's commitment to clear all mined areas as well as meeting the country's Article 5 deadline, resources permitting.

Much as we are very pleased about the progress achieved so far, it is also important to be realistic and acknowledge that we still have a very difficult task ahead in order to meet our deadline. If it took us about 7 years to clear half the mined areas, it may take us almost the same time if not longer to clear the rest of the mined areas. But unfortunately our deadline does not afford us such luxury. We only have about 4 years left to achieve this feat. In short, Zimbabwe is already behind schedule in its National Mine Action Plan due to limited resources. Our plan was based on the premise that national resources would be complemented by donor assistance. Since no assistance has been forthcoming to date, we do not see ourselves being able to meet the deadline. This setback can only be overcome by increasing the number of our demining teams so that we can tackle more than one minefield at a time. However, resource limitation in terms of demining equipment and logistical backup makes it impossible for us to form additional teams.

We are meanwhile not just sitting around lamenting lack of donor support, we continue with our efforts to clear all mined areas with the limited resources budgeted for on an annual basis by the government. This year the national mine clearance programme was allocated over 270 000 US dollars. Subsequently, our demining teams that were under training for the last three months completed training last week and are deploying to a new area as I speak. The deployment will be to the Sango Border Post to Crooks Corner minefield that will not only see safe movement of locals and their livestock but that of game and tourists as well. This is so because clearance of this minefield will facilitate the long awaited establishment of what is going to be one of the world's largest Game Sanctuary; The Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park which will straddle the Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe borders. Unless this minefield is cleared, this regional dream will remain a dream indeed, since the Zimbabwean side of the proposed park is still heavily mined. This minefield that was originally thought to be only 50 km is in fact 70 km long. Furthermore, instead of only one stretch, there is a second that runs parallel to the first also stretching for about 70 km. This simply means our teams will be in this area longer than we had anticipated. But despite, by the time we meet in September for the 7MSP and for the next Standing Committee Meetings, considerable progress will have been recorded on this minefield as part of our endeavours not just to meet our 2009 deadline, but to make Zimbabwe a mine free country.

I Thank you.