ZIMBABWE'S STATEMENT ON MINE ACTION TO THE 7TH MEETING OF
STATE PARTIES HELD IN GENEVA 18-22 SEPTEMBER 2006

Mr President for affording me this opportunity to give an update to
this important meeting on the progress of mine action in Zimbabwe. Allow
me to start by thanking you and the rest of your team for successfully
preparing and hosting this meeting.

It gives me pleasure to report progress achieved since the last meeting in
Zagreb in last year. Perhaps before I provide current information as far as
Mine Action in Zimbabwe is concerned, let me start by reminding the meeting
that Zimbabwe has a National Mine Action Plan which is already being
implemented. By year 2005, almost 50% of all mined areas had been cleared
from a total of over 700km stretch of minefields. The national plan prioritises
clearing of mines, complemented by mine risk education and victim
assistance. The clearance plan is currently being executed and is facing
challenges of shortage of financial resources and equipment. The plan was
based on the premise that the country was going to receive additional
support from willing partners which unfortunately has not been forthcoming.
It follows therefore that all mine clearance efforts are going to be executed
by the Army Deminers using national inadequate resources to try and
meet our deadline in year 2009. Much as we are encouraged by the progress
made so far, it is important to be realistic and acknowledge that we still have
a very difficult task ahead of us in order to meet the deadline. It took us 7
intensive years to clear half the mined areas, it may take us much longer to
clear the remainder due to dwindling resources. In short, my country is way
behind schedule in its mine action plan due to limited resources.

As Zimbabwe reported to the Standing Committee meetings here in May this
year, a team of Army Deminers are deployed clearing the 70km double
stretch Sango Border Post to Crooks Corner minefield in the South Eastern
Lowveld along our border with South Africa and Mozambique. To date over
600 000m² has been cleared with over 200 mines destroyed so far. The
government of Zimbabwe provided over all the resources for this operation
and funding is steadily being increased in order to provide more resources to
this operation through still inadequate.

Let me reiterate that it is practically impossible to meet our deadline in year
2009 using national resources. We are left with no option but to revise the
whole National Mine Action Plan. In essence, my country is considering
applying for an extension of the deadline for Zimbabwe by a number of still to
be determined basing on the rate of clearance currently being achieved. This
application will be finalised and forwarded through the appropriate channels,
We therefore welcome the current discussions aimed at seeking ways to allow mine affected countries that are not in a position to meet their deadlines to seek extensions.

In as far as the rehabilitation and reintegration of landmine survivors is concerned, my country has still a lot to do. The major development in this area is a landmine impact survey which is going to be undertaken in the last quarter of this year in the country. This survey is going to provide the statistics of the survivors, their locations, needs, possible networks, and self-help projects to mention but a few of the objectives. This project is being funded by UNDP through the country's Department of Civil Protection. Previously, the survivors would just be treated in local hospitals and discharged, with a few of them getting minimal assistance from the government. Most of these survivors are located in far remote areas which are difficult to access. Other than UNDP, other organisations have or is contemplating assisting the landmine survivors as well now.

Currently, there are several mine risk education campaigns going on in Zimbabwe. In the past 20 months, 15 people died after detonating mines in areas closer to the minefields. There certainly could be more cases which went unreported since almost all mined areas are close to the border which is rural and difficult to access. These alarming figures were provided by the local police and all occurred on a partially cleared 130km stretch of the Mozambique border minefield on our North Eastern border. Let me say that this is the reason why a wholistic land mine impact survey is to be launched this year.

I will not say much about our stockpile destruction which we conducted in November 2000, but suffice to say my country retained 700 anti-personnel mines for use in the training of our own troops and assisting deminers on training. This training will enable identification of these mines, detection, neutralising and destruction of the mines. None of these were destroyed during this training. This year alone over 200 Army deminers were trained using the retained mines mainly in detection techniques, identification and neutralisation process.

In conclusion madam Chris, much as Zimbabwe welcomes the current efforts aimed at seeking ways for mine affected countries to extend their deadlines under Article 5, we believe we should also critically assess why almost every member state is going to fail to meet its deadline. In short, we need to re-strategise our approach to the Convention so that we comply with our obligations to the Convention despite the several challenges we are going to do so.