

# Zambia declares mined areas are safe once again

ZAMBIA has become the third country in Southern Africa to declare that all mined areas are now safe for normal human activity. The announcement puts the country ahead of schedule regarding its obligations under the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, which it joined in 2001. This will enhance cross border trading, open rail and road routes to the coastal towns and a railway to Angolan ports, and revitalize tourist zones, said Sheila Mweemba, Director of the Zambia Mine Action Center (ZMAC).

Zambia is the third country in the region, after Malawi and Swaziland, to declare having cleared or otherwise safely released all known mined areas in its territory.

The Foreign Affairs Deputy Minister and Chairperson of the National Authority on anti-personnel mines, Professor Fashion Phiri, said he is proud of Zambia's achievement and extended his deepest gratitude to all cooperating partners who made it possible. Without their timely assistance, Zambia would not have been able to declare completion well ahead of its 2013 deadline. Phiri also thanked the Zambia Army Corps of Engineers for having done a commendable job.

When asked what Zambia's announcement means for the region, the ZMAC director said: Southern Africa is one of the most mine-affected areas in the world. Some of Zambia's neighbours have a serious problem - two of them, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, have recently been granted extension requests to deal with the problem. I think Zambia's completion could serve as an encouragement to Mozambique and Zimbabwe, as well as to Angola which also has a large task of demining ahead of it, said Mweemba.

## What challenges remain?

Zambia must continue to care for the mine survivors and contend with the problems caused by other explosive remnants in rural areas as a result of conflicts in neighbouring countries.

“After clearing all mines we still have to overcome another hurdle,” said Mweemba, “people could still get injured or killed if they tamper with explosive remnants. Risk education will continue to be one of our priorities.”

The announcement comes as world leaders prepare to attend the Second Review Conference of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, The Cartagena Summit on a Mine-Free World which will take place in Colombia from 29 November to 4 December.

Cartagena Summit President, **Ambassador Susan Eckey of Norway**, said that Zambia’s announcement is of great significance, especially as it takes place only 18 days before the summit begins.

“Zambia’s efforts further demonstrate that the Convention is working,” said Ambassador Eckey. “At the Cartagena Summit on a Mine-Free World I hope world leaders are inspired by Zambia’s example and recommit to the pursuit of a world free of anti-personnel mines.”

## **Mines in Zambia**

From the 1960s to the 1990s, Zambia was affected by mines and other explosive remnants of war as a result of the actions, on Zambian territory, of neighbouring countries’ armed forces as well as armed non-State actors.

Following demining and explosive ordnance disposal efforts undertaken by the Zambian Armed Forces, in 2008, areas suspected to contain anti-personnel mines and / or other explosive remnants of war were thought to remain in seven of Zambia’s nine provinces.

In August 2008, Zambia commissioned Norwegian People’s Aid to conduct a comprehensive survey of landmines and other explosive remnants of war in order to clarify the extent of the remaining contamination.

The survey confirmed one area containing bulk unexploded ordnance, two areas containing unexploded submunitions and 15 areas consisting of scattered explosive remnants of war, abandoned or otherwise remaining in such a manner that the precise location of the hazard is not precisely located.

## **The AP Mine Ban Convention**

The AP Mine Ban Convention bans anti-personnel mines and requires states that join the Convention to destroy all existing stocks, clear all mined areas and assist the survivors. 156 States are party to the Convention. Over 1,000 participants including heads of States and Governments are expected to attend The Cartagena Summit in Colombia.