

Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction

Volume 10
Issue 1 *The Journal of Mine Action*

Article 7

August 2006

Zimbabwe

Country Profile

Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at JMU (CISR)

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Recommended Citation

Profile, Country (2006) "Zimbabwe," *Journal of Mine Action* : Vol. 10 : Iss. 1 , Article 7.
Available at: <https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol10/iss1/7>

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Zimbabwe

Updated Tuesday, 17-Sep-2013 16:33:57 EDT

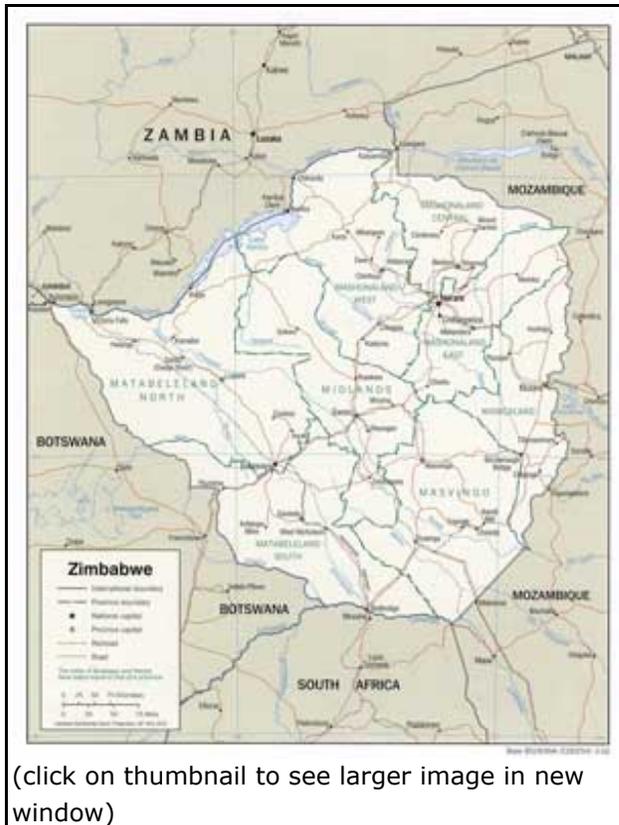
By: Megan Wertz [Mine Action Information Center]

During the War of Liberation between 1976 and 1979, the Rhodesian Army laid minefields along the northern and eastern borders of Zimbabwe (formerly known as Rhodesia). The Rhodesian Army handed over minefield records to the Zimbabwe National Army in 1980. The minefields were emplaced in standard patterns and were marked and posted with danger/warning signs, but many of these signs have been stolen, destroyed or removed over time. It was initially estimated that 2.5 million anti-personnel mines were emplaced in Zimbabwe and the remaining minefields stretch 218 miles. Zimbabwe signed the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention¹ on Dec. 3, 1997, and ratified it June 18, 1998. In January 2001, Zimbabwe enacted the Anti-personnel Mines (Prohibition) Act 2000, which incorporated the Ottawa Convention into Zimbabwe's domestic law.

Zimbabwe is a past producer and exporter of AP mines. The country destroyed its stockpile of 4,092 AP mines in November 2000, retaining 700 mines for training purposes. None of the retained mines have been destroyed during training activities; Zimbabwe has yet to report on the intended purposes and actual use of its retained mines.

Landmine Impact

Four provinces in Zimbabwe are affected by landmines, and all nine provinces are affected by unexploded ordnance. The landmine/UXO threat has restricted developmental progress, such as construction of bridges, schools, roads and boreholes. In many areas, minefields have cut rural communities off from their customary lands and blocked access to waterholes, streams and rivers. Most rural areas do not have piped water, resulting in villagers and livestock walking long distances to obtain water supplies or risking taking shorter routes through mined areas.



Northeastern minefields pose a problem due to the existence of the African sleeping sickness-spreading Tsetse fly and foot-and-mouth disease threats in the area. These minefields have prevented medical teams from entering affected areas, inhibiting implementation of an effective disease-eradication program.

Distribution of electricity to outlying communities, as well as agro-forestry, livestock and mining industries, have failed to expand or even commence. In the southeast, the border minefield in the Gonarezhou National Park area has affected the migration patterns of local elephant herds. The minefield has also been the culprit for the loss of many rare species, either directly or through disruption of the food chain.

Mine Action Program

The National Mine Action Authority in Zimbabwe regulates mine-action activities. The Zimbabwe Mine Action Centre implements and coordinates demining activities, while the National Demining Office carries out demining and mine-risk education. The Zimbabwe National Army is the only body undertaking demining activities—no other countries, nongovernmental organizations or commercial companies are involved in demining in Zimbabwe.² Per the Ottawa Convention and the country's 2005–2009 Implementation Plan, the mine/UXO clearance deadline is 2009. According to ZIMAC Director Col. TJ Munongwa, however, this deadline is no longer obtainable due to inadequate funding.³

Besides funding, there are a few other obstacles hindering speedy clearance. The minefields occupy large stretches of land including terrain that is rugged and thickly vegetated, which makes demining difficult. Munongwa says, "Only manual clearance is being done, hence the lack of speed."² Some soils in certain minefields have a high content of metal particles that disturb detection since all the mine detectors are metal detectors. The changes in soil textures also mean the need to use a variety of detectors for different areas, which are not readily available.

Demining teams are currently being deployed to Gonarezhou Game Park, which is also known as Sango Border Post. The Mukumbura minefield, also known as the Msengezi to Rwenya River minefield, has 81 miles cleared, with 127 miles left to be cleared. A team will be deployed in 2006 to the Burma Valley minefield to reevaluate the extent of the minefield.

Victim Assistance and Mine Awareness

Lack of funding, qualified staff and medical supplies, along with severe deterioration of health facilities, have caused Zimbabwe's healthcare system to deteriorate. Access to healthcare facilities is difficult for mine survivors living in remote areas; many mine casualties are believed to die before reaching a suitably equipped medical facility. Emergency medical care and basic prostheses or crutches are provided free of charge in rehabilitation centers, but survivors and their families have to pay for continued health care and replacement of artificial limbs.

The mine-awareness programs currently in place are only those conducted by Army Mine Awareness Teams. Plans are in place for expansion of these programs as long as funds are made available. Mine-awareness campaigns are mostly held in areas where demining operations will occur. Zimbabwe hopes to compile a database of victims but thus far has not been able to accomplish this goal due to lack of funding.

Reaching Mine-safe Status

There have been several obstacles in the demining efforts of Zimbabwe, but demining teams are

certainly making progress. Since demining operations started, over eight million mines and pieces of UXO have been cleared. Though the goal of being "mine free"⁴ by 2009 is not currently reachable, hope is not lost. Once additional funding is acquired, the dedication and drive of the government will create a mine-safe Zimbabwe.

Biography

Megan Wertz has worked for the Journal of Mine Action since August 2005. She graduated in May 2006 from James Madison University with a Bachelor of Science in technical and scientific communication. Wertz will attend The George Washington University in the fall to obtain a Master of Arts in public policy and hopes to pursue a career in environmental policy.



Endnotes

1. *Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction*, Oslo, Norway. 18 Sept. 1997. http://www.un.org/Depts/mine/UNDocs/ban_trty.htm. Accessed 26 April 2006. The document was opened for signature in Ottawa, Canada, 3 Dec. 1997, and thus is commonly known as the Ottawa Convention.
2. The reason for limited demining activities is the lack of funding. Both the European Union and United States withdrew their support in 2000, in protest of the government's human rights and governance record. *The World News Network*, Feb. 27, 2004, <http://archive.wn.com/2004/03/02/1400/p/2d/bfe8d32ff32db1.html>. Accessed June 9, 2006.
3. E-mail interview. T.J. Munongwa, Director, Zimbabwe Mine Action Center. Feb. 3, 2006.
4. Editor's Note: Some countries and mine-action organizations are urging the use of the term "mine free," while others are espousing the term "mine safe" or "impact free." "Mine free" connotes a condition where all landmines have been cleared, whereas the terms "mine safe" and "impact free" refer to the condition in which landmines no longer pose a credible threat to a community or country.

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1. "Joint Assessment Mission Report: Zimbabwe." United Nations Mine Action Service. Feb. 15, 2000. <http://www.mineaction.org/docs.asp?c=190>. Accessed Jan. 11, 2006.
2. "Zimbabwe." *Landmine Monitor Report* 2005. International Campaign to Ban Landmines. <http://www.icbl.org/lm/2005/zimbabwe.html>. Accessed Jan. 11, 2006.
3. "Zimbabwe." *E-MINE: The Electronic Mine Information Network*. <http://www.mineaction.org/country.asp?c=190>. Accessed Jan. 11, 2006.

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