

STATEMENT DELIVERED BY H E AMBASSADOR BRIGADIER E MUZONZINI (Rtd), ZIMBABWE'S AMBASSADOR TO KENYA ON THE OCCASION OF THE FIRST REVIEW CONFERENCE ON THE CONVENTION ON THE PROHIBITION OF THE USE, STOCKPILING, PRODUCTION AND TRANSFER OF ANTI-PERSONNEL MINES AND THEIR DESTRUCTION.

02 December 2004

On behalf of the Zimbabwe delegation, allow me first to take this opportunity to congratulate you Ambassador Wolfgang Petritsch, on your election to the Presidency of this Review Conference. I would also wish to recognize the Secretary-General of the Review Conference, Ambassador Esther Tolle and her team for making it possible to undertake what is promising to be a successful conference. In the same vein I also wish to pay tribute to the Government and people of Kenya for placing at our disposal excellent facilities for this conference.

Let me also extend my personal gratitude to His Excellency President, Mwai Kibaki, the President of the Republic of Kenya, for inviting my President, His Excellency President Mugabe to the Nairobi Summit on a Mine-Free World who could not be here today due to earlier commitments.

May I also take this opportunity to applaud the decision by Ethiopia to ratify the Ottawa Convention. It is my fervent hope that such commitment will spur those countries that have not yet acceded to the Convention to do so soon rather than later.

Mr. President, Zimbabwe and the African region were among the first and strongest pillars on which the young and fragile Convention rested during its delicate negotiation process and its coming into force in 1997. The

conference on landmines that the OAU organised in Kempton Park, Johannesburg, in May 1997 was a major catalyst in focusing international opinion towards the total ban of anti-personnel landmines. It is therefore significant that we are here today meeting on African soil to review this important instrument of international humanitarian law five years on.

Mr. President, at the height of Zimbabwe's war of liberation, the Rhodesian army laid minefields along our northern and eastern borders, with the aim of preventing the movement of freedom fighters operating from Zambia and Mozambique. Since that time, the anti-personnel mines have been an ever-menacing spectre for our communities in the border areas. The cessation of hostilities in 1980 did not end this menace, as the actions of our enemies during the war have remained a humanitarian as well as a socio-economic problem to this day.

The anti-personnel mines, which litter our borders, are not only indiscriminate in their effects on people, livestock and the economy, but they have also proved very expensive to remove.

Mr. President, Article 5 of the Convention places on us as States Parties an obligation to clear all anti-personnel mines in mined areas under our respective jurisdictions. On our part, Zimbabwe has dedicated its own considerable resources towards mine action programmes. However the challenge of mine contamination in Zimbabwe far exceeds what our limited national capabilities can deal with. As a nation we simply do not have the adequate resources that match the enormity of the challenge.

Despite the lack of international support, Zimbabwe remains committed to continue implementing the provision of the Convention for the benefit of its people and economy as indicated in our Five Year Action Plan for 2004-2009. This unqualified commitment will see government allocating more resources towards the de-mining programme as well as assist landmine victims by empowering them to be self-reliant.

Fortunately, in their wisdom, the authors of the Convention also addressed situations like that Zimbabwe and other poor nations find themselves in. The Convention establishes a link between, on one hand, States Parties' primary responsibility contained in Article 5 and, on the other, Article 6, which calls for international co-operation and assistance. We believe this provision of the Convention is very important as it opens up a new vista in international co-operation to enhance human security and social-economic development. Given the enormity of the challenge my country appeals to the international community to augment our efforts in meeting its obligations under the Convention.

Regrettably Mr. President, while a number of those delegations which made interventions at this Review Conference have happily alluded to one form of donor assistance or the other, we in Zimbabwe are not in a position to report of any current assistance, despite the existence of an obvious and compelling need. For Zimbabwe, the Convention has therefore not been the success story that appears to have been the case for some countries that benefited from international assistance. My delegation therefore finds it difficult to celebrate with other States Parties on the Convention's First Review Conference.

Let me hasten to assure you Mr President, that Zimbabwe will strenuously work towards the promotion of the universalisation of the Convention in all relevant fora by urging and supporting the involvement and active cooperation by all in relevant international and regional institutions and organisations.

Mr. President, the United Nations and the rest of the international community have been primed of our now familiar story, which has been told with monotonous regularity at successive meetings of States Parties to the Convention, during previous inter-sessional meetings, and also in our obligatory annual reports. Our request for assistance has not elicited any positive response, with potential donors choosing to look the other way. Even the United Nations, our own organisation, has not yet found within itself even symbolic resources to help us address the problem of mine contamination in my country. We have sadly observed that our cooperating partners appear to be influenced by other agendas, and not by need. My delegation wishes to stress the need to keep the focus of our individual and collective action on the Convention's primary objective, which is to protect life and limb from the menace of anti-personnel mines, assist the victims and survivors of these mines, as well as remove this obstacle to socio-economic development.

The list of land mine casualties includes innocent villagers, young boys and girls tending family livestock, and rural women fending for their families. A few months ago in the Binga District along Zimbabwe's northern frontier with Zambia, a herd of cattle strayed into a minefield bordering a remote village. Two of the animals were blown up, and almost immediately

thereafter, two brothers were blown up in rapid succession as they tried to save or retrieve the injured animals. Horrific stories such as these abound along our border districts with Zambia and Mozambique. Mr. President, such survivors and victims of landmines require tangible assistance beyond mere expressions of sympathy at meetings such as this one. State and international assistance is important in ensuring that survivors and victims lead normal lives; they should not be victims of discrimination as they are already victims of trauma.

Mr. President, we are grateful to some non-States Parties who have contributed considerable resources for mine action programmes. Some of them are major producers of anti-personnel mines and have huge stockpiles of these mines. Regrettably, some of these countries have resisted membership of our Ottawa Convention family. While we appreciate their generosity, we are confident that the Ottawa Convention would be advanced if they join our family.

Lastly, I wish to pay tribute to many in this room, and those who could not make it here, who have tirelessly and courageously fought a very good fight in advancing the frontiers of a mine-free world. They have invested a lot of time, energy and resources into this worthy cause, and all of us have been inspired by their good works. We are confident that through your individual and our collective action, the Convention will endure and deliver on its humanitarian promise of a mine free future.

I thank you.