



Residual risk and sustainable national capacities in the Republic of Zambia

Zambia Mine Action Centre and Mines Advisory Group

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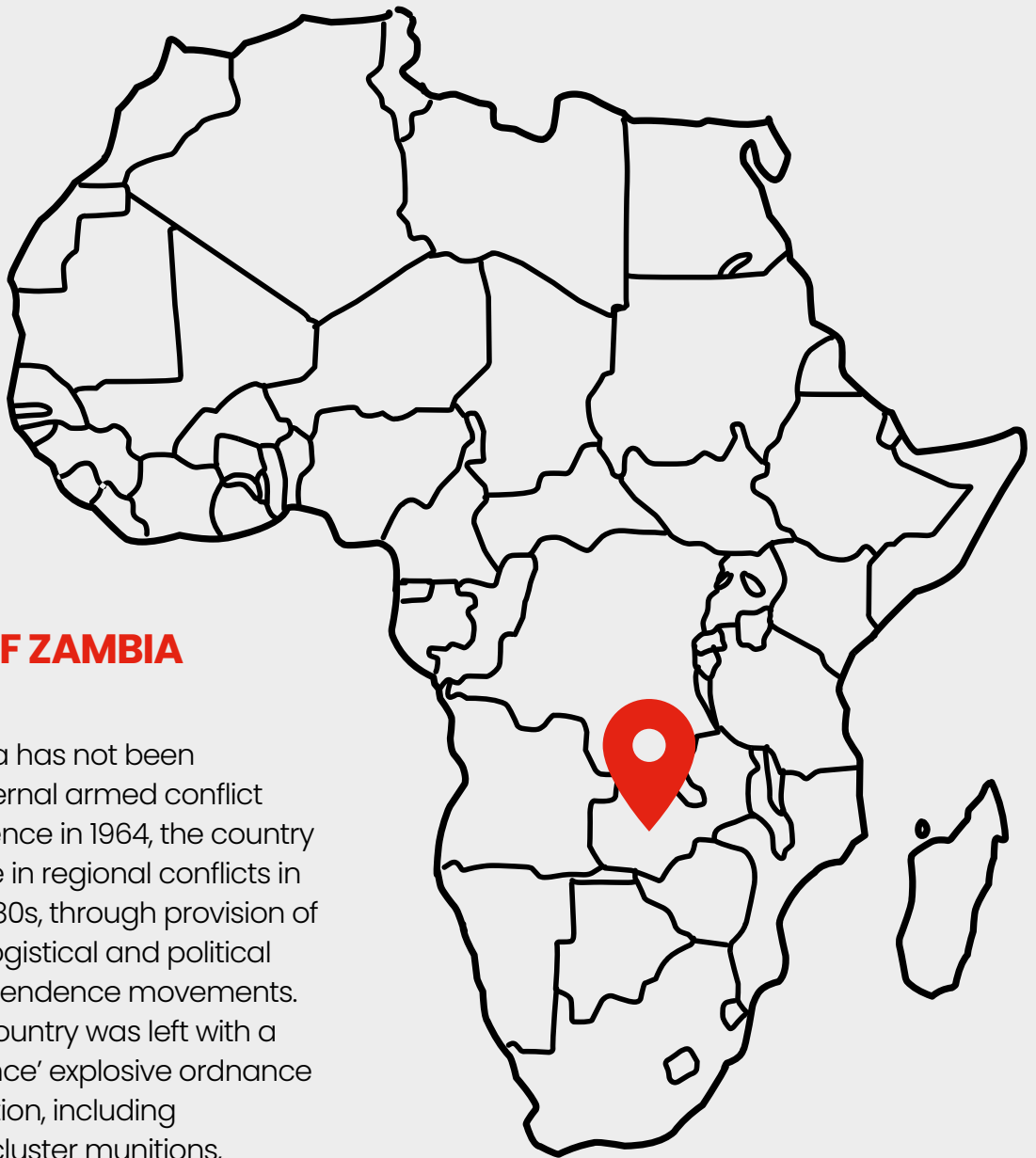
INTRODUCTION

As we approach the Fifth Review Conference of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (APMBC), a growing number of states have reached or are approaching completion under Article 5. This progress is encouraging – but also presents unfamiliar challenges. As the most mature of the family of humanitarian disarmament instruments, the APMBC must lead the way in answering key questions around sustainability, national and international resourcing, and continued commitment to the other articles and broader norms of the Convention.

As a State Party to both the APMBC and the Convention on Cluster Munitions, Zambia declared completion under both frameworks in 2009.

Reflecting a strong national commitment to humanitarian disarmament, the Zambia Mine Action Centre (ZMAC) has remained an active entity, coordinating the cross-Ministerial response to residual contamination and maintaining active engagement with the APMBC machinery. ZMAC has worked closely with MAG to analyse good practice, lessons learned, and challenges gained through decades of implementing its national mine action programme and working as an international policymaker under the APMBC.

This paper presents these insights into post-completion management, exploring how states navigate a changing context post-completion, and what is meant by sustainable national capacities within the framework of the APMBC.



THE CASE OF ZAMBIA

Although Zambia has not been impacted by internal armed conflict since independence in 1964, the country played a key role in regional conflicts in the 1970s and 1980s, through provision of administrative, logistical and political support to independence movements. As a result, the country was left with a legacy of 'nuisance' explosive ordnance (EO) contamination, including landmines and cluster munitions, affecting around 41 sites (3000km² of Zambian territory) primarily along border regions with the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Angola.

Following clearance operations conducted by the Zambian military, Zambia declared completion under both the APMBC and CCM in 2009. However, residual EO contamination and associated accidents continue to be reported in rural areas. Six of ten provinces countrywide are thought to remain contaminated by EO contamination, with ZMAC receiving 30-40 'official' reports of EO each year – as well as additional reports through their network of community volunteers.

Since completion, Zambia has opted to maintain a mine action centre as an active entity, with ZMAC positioned under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs & International Cooperation and responsible for coordinating engagement and reporting across all disarmament treaties. ZMAC is allocated a budget from the treasury, and coordinates a cross-Ministerial response to residual contamination under the supervision of a policy making body – the National Committee on Anti-Personnel Landmines (NCAL) – which meets once every quarter and is composed of 16 Permanent Secretaries from their respective Ministries.

GOOD PRACTICE / LESSONS LEARNED

- Political commitment to humanitarian disarmament: Zambia continues to invest in maintaining the ZMAC, and in doing so provides a crucial coordination mechanism for addressing the threat of residual contamination at an implementation level. However, maintaining ZMAC as an active entity likewise enables continued active engagement with disarmament treaties and the APMBC machinery, including chairing the Article 5 Committee during the year of the 19MSP, and currently as a member of the Victim Assistance Committee until the end of the Review Conference. In 2026, Zambia will take on the Presidency of the Convention following Japan.
- Sustainable, community-based reporting mechanisms: ZMAC manages a community volunteer network operational across three provinces, who deliver explosive ordnance risk education in impacted communities, and provide an additional direct reporting channel to ZMAC for community members who may be nervous about reporting through security forces. This cost-effective, sustainable structure has demonstrated meaningful impact as a community liaison function.
- EOD capacity: At an operational level, ZMAC coordinates and mobilises a cross-cutting and holistic EOD response to reports of residual contamination, with trained security sector EOD teams deployed alongside ZMAC victim assistance and EORE experts. In this way, an EOD call-out can act as a starting point for a broader integrated mine action response, incorporating victim assistance referrals and data collection, EORE delivery, and further survey as appropriate.
- Decline in international support: Zambia experienced a sharp decline international assistance and financing following completion of treaty obligations, as a time when it had not yet graduated to middle income status, with numerous competing pressures on the national budget. The impact of the consequent funding gap is primarily operational in nature, with the national EOD capacity no longer fully-funded since completion. Due to limited resources, the ZMAC experiences a continued backlog of EO reports which are often not addressed for up to six months as they are unable to fund the EOD response capacity. This slow response time has led to cases of items being removed, and discourages communities from reporting.

CONSIDERATIONS / CONCLUSIONS

- Maintaining political commitment to humanitarian disarmament post-completion is crucial. Zambia's continued investment in the ZMAC and active engagement with the APMBC machinery sets a strong example. States Parties approaching completion should consider how to sustain national mine action entities and treaty engagement.
- Developing sustainable, community-based reporting mechanisms like Zambia's volunteer network can provide a cost-effective way to maintain explosive ordnance risk education (EORE) and reporting channels post-completion. Other States Parties can look to replicate similar models.
- Zambia's holistic EOD response coordinated by ZMAC, integrating EOD with victim assistance, data collection, EORE and survey is a best practice to emulate. It allows EOD call-outs to kick-start broader mine action activities as needed post-completion.
- The sharp decline in international support experienced by Zambia post-completion, before reaching middle-income status,

highlights the need for the international community to consider how to responsibly transition support to States Parties. Abrupt drop-offs in funding can hinder States' abilities to respond to residual risks. Transition planning and sustained financing to address residual contamination are essential.

- Zambia's backlog in responding to EO reports due to funding shortfalls for the EOD response demonstrates the operational impacts when national capacity is not fully sustainable post-completion. Delays discourage reporting and pose public safety risks. The international community should support States Parties to develop fully self-sufficient and timely EOD response capacities as part of completion transition planning.

In summary, as more States Parties approach completion, the APMBC community must consider how to responsibly transition international support, while States take steps to ensure sustainable national capacity and financing for residual contamination management and continued treaty engagement. Zambia's experiences provide valuable insight into good practices, lessons learned and challenges that can inform this process.