

## Progress Slow on Landmine Ban

- [Arms Control Today](#)

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Fifteen years after the global Mine Ban Treaty entered into force, many countries plagued with explosives are struggling to meet their commitments to survey and clear contaminated areas.

After the latest meeting of the parties to the treaty in Geneva in April, 27 countries are seeking or have obtained extensions on their obligations under the treaty, according to the treaty's implementation support unit. That is one fewer than the number of countries that have announced completion of their efforts to clear their land of buried munitions.

Under Article 5 of the treaty, states are required to clear all their landmine-affected areas within 10 years.

The states that have joined the treaty will meet June 23-27 in Mozambique to assess past progress and future challenges. The International Campaign to Ban Landmines says the number of states requesting extensions is now "alarmingly high."

### **Demining in a War Zone**

Three countries now seeking extensions—Eritrea, Yemen, and Zimbabwe—illustrate the challenges facing the effort to rid the world of anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions.

In its extension request, Yemen's National Mine Action Committee cited conditions of civil war, as well as money woes and inhospitable desert terrain, in requesting a five-year extension. Yemen still has at least 107 contaminated areas covering eight square kilometers, and 338 square kilometers of suspected hazardous territory that has yet to be evaluated, according to the committee.

Fighting between the Yemeni army and al Qaeda groups in 2011 in the governorates of Abyan, Sa'ada, Hajjah, Sana'a, and Amran has created a need for "survey operations to identify the extent of contamination. Successive conflicts have presented new and unexpected challenges with a resultant new and increased demand for mine action activities," the committee stated.

The government's Republican Guard laid thousands of landmines in Sana'a in 2011 in violation of the treaty, according to Human Rights Watch. Yemen has admitted the treaty violation, attributing it to ousted President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Yemen says the jihadist forces also have planted homemade anti-personnel landmines.

In the first nine months of 2013, Yemen's demining authority reported seven accidents that killed seven people and injured nine others.

### **Eritrea's Ordeal**

Colonial occupation, civil war, and conflict with neighboring Ethiopia have left Eritrea with large swaths of territory contaminated with landmines. In its request for a five-year extension, the Eritrea Demining Authority claimed it had cleared 287 contaminated areas covering 74 square kilometers in the past three years. Nonetheless, the authority says Eritrea still has 434 areas covering 33.5 square kilometers that need to be resurveyed.

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Published on Arms Control Association (<https://www.armscontrol.org>)

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The victims of landmines are mostly residents of rural areas where children often herd animals, according to the authority. Nine people have been reported killed and 43 injured by landmines since 2011. Eighty percent of the victims were under 18 years of age.

Lack of funding is likely to continue to impede Eritrea's efforts, according to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines. The country says its projected costs for the extension period will amount to \$7.2 million, all to be raised nationally. In its extension request, Eritrea said it has stopped accepting international aid because its demining efforts are "more efficient" without assistance. For the last two years, Eritrea's national contribution has been only \$250,000.

Zimbabwe is requesting a three-year extension, the fourth extension it has sought since 2008. The country has 209 square kilometers of minefields that need to be cleared, according to the request from the Zimbabwean Mine Action Centre.

Zimbabwe received \$1.7 million in international financial assistance for demining in 2013, the first time the country has received outside help since 1999, according to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines. Economic sanctions against the government of Robert Mugabe have blocked the country's access to international institutions.

### U.S. Position Under Review

The United States is not a party to the treaty, but U.S. policy toward landmines has been "under review" since 2009. In recent weeks, some observers have said they believe a decision is near.

Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), a supporter of the treaty, has made a series of floor speeches this year urging the Obama administration to endorse the pact.

"If landmines were littering this country—in schoolyards, along roads, in corn fields, in our national parks—and hundreds of American children were being crippled...how long would it take before the White House sent the Mine Ban Treaty to the Senate for ratification?" Leahy asked in an April 9 statement.

On March 6, Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the House Armed Services Committee that he considered self-destructing landmines to be "an important tool" in the U.S. arsenal. The U.S. position is that self-destructing mines are more humane, but they are prohibited by the Mine Ban Treaty.

Dempsey said "the currency of the threat on the Korean peninsula" was a factor in his assessment.

**Source URL:** <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2014-05/progress-slow-landmine-ban>