

AN OPERATIONAL REVIEW OF THE ROLE OF MINE ACTION IN
ASSISTANCE TO MINE AND UXO VICTIMS

UNITED NATIONS MINE ACTION SERVICE REMARKS

Standing Committee On Victim Assistance, Socio-Economic
Reintegration And Mine Awareness – 7 May 2001

Thank you Mrs. Chair and thank you for this opportunity to share with you a few brief remarks to explain the importance of the GICHD study on the role of mine action in assistance to mine and UXO victims from the perspective of the United Nations mine action agencies.

To put it simply, the study is important to us because we hope it is going to help clarify what I would like to call the dichotomy of victim assistance.

On the one hand there is the human and political reality of mine action which we have tried to capture in the UN mine action policy developed three years ago. Mine action is not so much about mines, it is about people and communities affected by mines. The objective is not so much to lift mines as it is to alleviate the suffering of those affected by mines. People, starting with victims, are therefore clearly central to our efforts and victim assistance has been identified as one of the five core components of UN mine action along with mine clearance, mine awareness, stockpile destruction and advocacy in support of a global ban.

On the other hand, there is the human and operational reality of victim assistance. Victims cannot, should not be discriminated. All victims have the same rights and deserve the same level of attention and assistance, be they victims of a landmine, a car accident, or a disease.

The needs of landmine victims should therefore be addressed in the context of integrated victim assistance programmes targeting all victims of conflicts and persons with disabilities, as was so clearly explained by Dr. Del Ponte.

Mine action programmes in the field, Mine Action Commissions and Mine Action Coordination Centres (MACC) in particular, are often struggling to reconcile these two potentially contradicting realities. Because victim assistance is a core component of mine action, they sometimes try to include it in their mandated responsibilities. We had the example of Thailand mentioned this morning. But often they are not quite sure what to do next. Should they be involved in the actual implementation of victim assistance projects or in their coordination? Should they be simply involved in the collection and dissemination of relevant information? Or should they limit their role to advocating and raising funds to ensure that the needs of landmine victims are addressed? Those who have tried to take on a particularly pro-active role have often met mixed reactions.

I must say that we the UN have not been able to provide them with much guidance in this regard, and we are still unsure as to what guidance we should provide. We hope that, complementing other reference documents already published, the GICHD will provide us with the baseline information required for the development of guidelines on mine action programmes and victim assistance. Guidelines that will support the work of Mine Action Programme Managers in the field as well as UN agencies and other mine action agencies at headquarters level. This will allow us to go beyond the recognition that victim assistance is a key concern and an imperative, and to start defining what the operational implications of it are, if any, in the field for our mine action programmes.