

## **Expert response by the ICBL on progress in the VA 24**

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The statement our colleagues Jesus and Omara Khan have just made raises some very important questions. But I am going to repeat just one: Can we accept the possibility that we are living in a paper paradise or shall we all do a reality-check?

Today, 499 days after the Nairobi Summit, ICBL feels the need to reiterate the message it sent out then: it is time to turn words into deeds!

Since the Nairobi Summit, victim assistance has become a priority agenda item of our Mine Ban Treaty meetings, and rightly so. Too many people, many of them children, have been killed or hurt for life by mines. Initiatives such as the Survivor Summit, the Nairobi Action Plan, the VA Questionnaire and the Zagreb Progress Report all recognize the fact that survivors, their families and mine-affected communities deserve sustained and often life-long assistance.

Last year, we gained better understanding of the situation in the 24 most-affected countries, and with support of the ISU experts, objectives were set. This year is crucial as, one-third through the period set by the Nairobi Action Plan, we need to turn these words into SMART actions, to keep our collective promise to an estimated 400,000 survivors to ensure that the Questionnaire and the Zagreb Progress Report are not just ‘another piece of paper’.

However, we regret that for this meeting only ten of the delegations included a VA expert on their team and that nine delegations did not give us a chance to hear about their plans, progress and challenges.

Progress has been made, optimism is in place, but ICBL also would like to take a moment to carry out a reality-check. Because, as our Ambassador Song Kosal said in Nairobi, some things are being done but not enough. Some survivors have been helped, but not enough.

The variety of topics discussed and the depth of the presentations shows us that knowledge of the issues has improved immensely since 1999, and we have heard that many initiatives are still ongoing to improve our knowledge and assess the situation. However, the need for better information is no excuse to postpone action, since the experience countries have accrued over the years should be sufficient to get things started so that survivors and persons with disabilities do not become data victims.

We realize that survivor assistance is embedded in national development plans and needs thorough coordination and participation of all actors, especially mine survivors. So, thank you Afghanistan for setting a good example and for introducing us to Firoz. Let us hope we will see more of him and others in the future.

We have heard a lot of good intentions, future plans and in some cases, such as Albania, a solid progress report on the concrete steps taken towards the realization of the national objectives. However in many cases, ICBL would have liked to hear HOW countries, like Serbia and Montenegro or DRC are planning to realistically achieve their future plans, who will implement them and how these projects can be sustainable in the various national contexts.

ICBL is pleased to hear that previous remarks about the lack of cooperation with all stakeholders have been taken onboard and that partnerships with a wide range of actors have been highlighted. Tajikistan is a case in point. However, in some cases, international NGOs have been providing services that national governments should be providing. And have been doing this for many years. ICBL realizes that national capacity-building is a gradual process, but would like encourage states to take national ownership and see the work of international NGOs for what it is: A temporary solution. Otherwise the collapse of services is a real risk, as in Angola.

We have heard many countries, like Thailand stating that a variety of services is free. However, ICBL still hears from many survivors from all over the world, including Colombia and Nicaragua, that they cannot afford appropriate services. Sometimes qualitative, or complex treatment is not free. Poor patients wait longer than persons who can pay. Even if services are free, we advocate strongly to also find ways to finance transport and accommodation for the survivor and if necessary a care-taker or child that cannot be left home alone.

For many survivors, the most important issue is to reclaim their roles as productive members of society, the importance of socio-economic reintegration cannot be overstated and it is good to see that many States Parties have touched upon this in their presentations. However, ICBL advocates that socioeconomic reintegration opportunities need to be extended beyond the individual survivor to include all mine victims - as 'victim', under the ICBL definition, means the mine survivor, his family and the mine-affected community as a whole. It is also worrying that several projects in Tajikistan and Yemen have not been able to secure funding. So, whereas limited available financial resources cannot be solely responsible for not implementing victim assistance programmes, the national governments and international community are urged to provide adequate financial means.

Victim assistance is, above all, a rights issue and numerous states have seen the need for legislation to ensure the adequate care and protection of their disabled citizens. So we are happy to hear that new legislation including penalties has been passed in Uganda, Sudan mentioned that other conventions and tools exist to enforce rights of survivors and persons with disabilities.

As time is limited and we have many more issues we could discuss, therefore I would like to repeat that you can find more information in the report *Landmine Victim Assistance in 2005: Overview of the Situation in 24 States Parties*, in which the Working Group on Victim Assistance provides the baseline on which to measure progress on the implementation of the Nairobi Action Plan until 2009. It includes a more detailed overview of the issues outlined above. The report was produced by Standing Tall Australia with assistance of Handicap International, and with the kind financial support of Australia. It is available outside this room.

Finally, I would like to remind you that, every day, there are more new survivors and persons with disabilities all over the world. ICBL is concerned about the increasing number of casualties and problems providing adequate assistance also in countries who have not joined the Mine Ban Treaty. It encourages those states to use the tools devised for the VA 24.

Let us just keep in mind: This is our chance to turn words into SMART actions.  
Thank you.