

Intersessional Standing Committee Meeting

25-29 May 2009 – Geneva

ICBL Statement on Victim Assistance

Mr. President, Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on behalf of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines. Let me share our observations and messages about the implementation of victim assistance in so-called VA26 countries.

Since 2005, the efforts undertaken by the victim assistance co-chairs raised awareness about how to approach victim assistance and more attention was given to this issue in the national and international level. Progress has been made in understanding the importance of coordination, data collection (*e.g. Jordan developed a data base of all known survivors*), planning (*e.g. victim assistance plan has inspired creation of national disability action plan in Cambodia and Afghanistan*), development of laws and policies to protect and promote the rights of people with disabilities (*e.g. Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted national disability policy that reflects the human rights based approach*), integration of victim assistance into public health and development and raising public awareness (*e.g. the landmine survivors and people with disabilities sensitize the government authorities about disability rights in Uganda and Bosnia and Herzegovina*).

But:

- Does understanding the importance of coordination make any difference if regular coordination is not in place or not functioning effectively? If it does not get financial and political support, can this coordination body make a difference?
- Does data collection make a difference if information is not accessible to implementers?
- Does having a plan or laws make impact if they are not implemented?
- And most importantly, what can the impact of these efforts be on the daily lives of survivors and people with disabilities if adequate resources not allocated?

Mr. President, we would like to share a couple of examples of challenges hampering the inclusion, empowerment and autonomy of survivors and people with disabilities.

- In Afghanistan people with disabilities are not allowed to drive, it is prohibited by law. Merely because a person is classified as having a disability, they are not allowed to drive. A proposed law which includes an article to give the right to people with disabilities to drive has been waiting for approval in cabinet and parliament for over 20 months, and other countries have to wait even longer, such as Cambodia. This delay keeps people with disabilities in isolation and prevents them from enjoying their basic human rights.
- In most of VA26 countries vast majority of side walks and buildings are not accessible. Even where the accessibility is improving the specific needs of survivors and other people with hearing and visual impairments are not taken into account. These obstacles do not only exclude people with disabilities from the services, they create barriers which prevent them from getting job, go to school, participate in social activities, and regain their independence.

The ICBL calls again on all the VA26 States and particularly those who have not revised their objectives since they were first developed, to do so in close partnership with civil society, survivors and people with

disabilities. And they should present it at the Second Review Conference, so they can leave the meeting ready to implement the plan.

We also call on VA26 States to report on the status of implementation and achievements at the Second Review Conference and we expect specific and measurable updates, for example:

- at the 6th Meeting of States Parties in 2005, one of the Yemen's objectives "*aimed at economically reintegrating 500 survivors by 2009*". At the Second Review Conference we would like to hear how and how many of those 500 Survivors are reintegrated.
- one of the Democratic Republic of Congo's objectives under psychological support and social reintegration stated "to build the capacity of social workers and psychologists working in mine affected areas". We would like to hear how many social workers and psychologists became involved on victim assistance since 2005 and what is the impact of their work on the day-to-day lives of survivors and people with disabilities?
- one of the Angola's objectives under emergency and continuing medical care stated "*...to improve accessibility to existing hospitals...*". We would like to hear how many hospitals became accessible and how this role is applied to new public buildings.

Without concrete plans with deadlines and allocation of necessary national and international funds, how is it possible to make real progress on the ground? Without survivors input, how is it possible to know if their highest priorities are being addressed? And without monitoring and reporting, how is it possible to know if progress is being made?

The expected specific and measurable updates help all of us to get a sense of progress, or at least understand the challenges why progress was not achieved as planned, and the steps taken to resolve the issue in future.

Having looked back, the Second Review Conference in November is another good opportunity for States Parties to find ways to remedy gaps to improve the quality and increase quantity of services. States Parties should affirm key principles such as non-discriminatory approach; rights-based approaches at all levels; inclusion of victim assistance into development, employment, health and disability strategies; gender and age equality; and synergies with other international legal instruments should be explored to avoid duplications and strengthen efforts.

Finally, we expect that the Cartagena Action Plan will include strong, forward-looking and measurable action on victim assistance. It should address national ownership (e.g. build the capacity of national stakeholders in order to create in-country resources), sustainability (e.g. mainstream victim assistance into existing relevant legal and policy frameworks and national development programs), inclusive development (e.g. when providing assistance, be it for mine action or development, the international community should ensure that sufficient resources are allocated for victim assistance and that these resources really change the daily lives of survivors), monitoring and reporting. It should incorporate the highest standards from Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities and other relevant instruments and it should show how States Parties of other related conventions can avoid duplication in planning, implementation and reporting.

We look forward to working with you in the preparation of the Second Review Conference to ensure the Cartagena Summit sends out strong message by delivering statements showing the community of States Parties' commitment to improving daily lives of survivors. So we expect the high level delegation and their active participation at this historic summit. We also urge government of Colombia to use this opportunity to make the city of Cartagena a model accessible city for survivors and people with disabilities.