

## **Assisting Landmine Survivors: A Decade of Efforts**

### ***A Symposium Marking the Tenth Anniversary of Vienna Meeting on the Convention for the Prohibition of Anti-personnel Mines on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2007, Vienna***

Opening Session – Speech by Margaret Arach Orech, ICBL Ambassador, Uganda

Your Excellencies, Ambassador Petricsh, Madame, Dr. Hans Winkler, State Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Caroline Millar, President of the 7 MSP, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is an honor for me to be invited to this landmark Symposium as we commemorate the Tenth Anniversary of Vienna Meeting on the Convention for the Prohibition of Anti - personnel Mines.

I thank the Austrian Government for organizing this symposium and for the tremendous work then have undertaken in Victim Assistance in the past and continue to date to ensure that lives of landmine survivors are better.

Ten years ago, when the Mine Ban Treaty was signed in 1997, I was not aware of the existence of landmines in my own country. Its devastating effects were beyond my imagination. To me, landmines were meant for combatants, the military. Little did I know that 1998, I would come face to face with the reality of being a victim of anti-personnel mines. I lost part of my right leg in a mine blast. It changed the course of my life.

Prior to the incident, I was in no way concerned about what people with disability go through. It was now my turn to know, feel and understand. An encounter with the ICBL through a landmine survivor in Harare gave me the opportunity to learn about the Mine Ban Treaty and the position of my country regarding this Treaty. In particular, Article 6.3.

Nine years later, as I look back, quite a lot has happened especially in the area of victim assistance. Although there are still new survivors being registered, Victim Assistance has come a long way.

- A social model that stresses removal of disabling barriers and the conception of disability as a human rights issue has emerged.
- Survivors' voices raised. They are empowered
- Survivor groups formed in mine affected areas and capacity being built. Survivors are being recognized and are more aware of their rights. They are now taking the lead on advocating for their rights.
- ICBL's principle of inclusion is taking shape though only at local and national level.
- Coordination of VA activities now being undertaken at the National Mine Action Centre including Data Collection.
- Government is making a move towards its obligation to Article 6.3 and has set specific objectives towards achieving it.
- Legislation and Policies on Disability enacted

Planning and implementation of VA in Uganda has taken a very positive path. All stakeholders are involved. These include ministry of Health Disability Desk, ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, National Council for Disability, National Union of Persons with Disability, NGOs, UN and the survivors themselves.

On the other hand, Government has not yet made any effort to include survivors in its delegations at Mine Ban Treaty related meetings.

Prosthetic technology used in the country needs to be reviewed to ensure it is appropriate to the need of survivors taking into consideration the terrain.

### **Challenges:**

- Although a lot of planning has been made, implementation of certain aspects of VA is curtailed and does not occur in a timely manner due to scarce resources.
- Accessibility to services by landmine survivors poor. Government facilitation needed to supplement NGOs in service delivery.
- Provision of improved and quality medical care and rehabilitation for new survivors.

### **Forethoughts for States Parties in the next Decade**

- Sign/Ratify the new Disability Convention
- Establish and enforce national disability laws and policies
- Establish social support mechanism that fosters reintegration of landmine survivors into their communities.
- Consider compensation package for landmine victims/ victims of war
- Support participation of landmine survivors in Mine Ban Treaty related meetings as part of government delegation.