

Introduction to Panel II : Economic Reintegration (Moderator: Sheree Bailey)

For many mine survivors, economic reintegration is their greatest concern and highest priority. The ability to earn an income and be productive members of their families and their communities plays a significant role in restoring self esteem and overall physical and psychological well-being. As we have already heard, the importance of economic reintegration was acknowledged by the States in the draft of the AP Mine Convention in article 6.3.

With me on the podium today to discuss this issue are Pia Korpinen an associate expert with the disability team at the Skills and Employability Department of the International Labour Organisation in Geneva, Dr. Veri Dogjani, the Victim Assistance Officer at the Albanian Mine Action Executive, and Alberto Cairo, head of the ICRC's Orthopaedic Program for the physical rehabilitation and socio-economic reintegration of persons with disabilities in Afghanistan.

Under Action #32 of the *Nairobi Action Plan 2005-2009*, adopted at the Convention's First Review Conference in 2004, States Parties agreed to "Actively support the socio-economic reintegration of mine victims, including providing education and vocational training and developing sustainable economic activities and employment opportunities in mine-affected communities, integrating such efforts in the broader context of economic development, and striving to ensure significant increases of economically reintegrated mine victims."

Activities that promote sustainable income generation and employment opportunities for mine survivors and other persons with disabilities represent a profound challenge in many mine-affected countries which are experiencing high levels of poverty and unemployment in the general population, and low levels of development. Over the past 10 years progress has been made on developing guidelines and implementing programs in some mine-affected countries.

Sometimes a simple solution is all that is needed to start a mine survivor and their family on the road to economic independence. In October 2005, I met a 37-year-old man in a hospital in Cambodia who was recovering from a landmine explosion that claimed his right leg above the knee and part of his left foot. He had been walking ahead of his wife and 18-month-old child on a well-trodden path when he stepped on the mine. His wife also suffered shrapnel injuries and his young son, who she was carrying on her hip, lost some of his fingers in the explosion. They have four other young children. The man was very depressed as he didn't know how he would be able to support his family as they were already very poor. But his wife had an idea. If she could get a bicycle and a basket she could collect scrap plastic to sell at the market she could earn enough income to support the family. So she was given a small grant and for \$50 she was set up with a bicycle, a bamboo basket, and a pair of scales. There was even \$3 left over to buy food. Last year, I was sent a photo of the family and while they are still poor the wife is earning enough money from her small business to support the family – and her husband was smiling again.

I would encourage donors and program implementers to remember that the focus should not only be on the mine survivor as economic reintegration can also be achieved by creating opportunities for members of their families to earn an income.

I will now give the floor to my colleagues who through their practical experience will address three questions: What can be done to develop sustainable economic activities in mine-affected areas that benefit individuals directly impacted by mines and other explosive remnants of war as well as their families and communities? How can we integrate victim assistance into the broader context of development?