

Assisting Landmine Survivors: A Decade of Efforts
Symposium marking the 10th anniversary of the Vienna meeting on the Convention

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Panel 1 –
Understanding the Challenge of Victim Assistance

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Good morning ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to be here in beautiful Vienna ten years after the decisive meeting leading to the creation of the Mine Ban Treaty. We are here to discuss one of the most rewarding but complex issues of the Treaty, victim assistance. The issue that puts people first.

During the last decade, our knowledge of victim assistance issues and the scope of the problem has improved radically.

But our first knowledge of the problem came from practitioners in the field who saw firsthand what kind of harm landmines caused and unfortunately still cause.

The first major achievement of the Mine Ban Treaty was actually including victim assistance. The MBT is the first multilateral disarmament treaty that calls upon states to take responsibility in assisting victims of a particular type of weapon, with as its main strength the close cooperation between governments, survivors, international organizations and NGOs working together closely to advance victim assistance - both in terms of understanding and implementation. It was understood that the scope of the problem was so large that immediate humanitarian action needed to be taken and that this was the responsibility of a multitude of actors.

Progress was seen soon after the entry into force of the Treaty both in terms of our understanding of the immediate effect on the affected populations. Our knowledge of how to understand who and what was included in victim assistance moved beyond what is written in Article 6.3 rapidly to encompass:

- The definitions and roles of those involved
- The scale of the problem
- The types of assistance needed and appropriate

As an introduction to the basic definitions, let me show you one of the photos of the 2006 global Landmine Monitor meeting, during which our researchers and campaigners played against these fine gentlemen of the disabled volleyball league in Cambodia, most of them mine/ERW survivors - and the researchers lost big time. While this might be just a sports event, I want to remind us all of the main thing we need to keep in mind. Mine survivors are not a problem to be solved. They are productive, creative and talented members of our societies and like all of us they have hopes and dreams. It is our role to provide the environment and opportunities that will enable mine survivors and other people with disabilities to fulfil their dreams and be active contributors to the community.

Today, we all find this statement completely normal. But this in itself should be seen as enormous progress in our understanding of the scope and context of victim assistance. As victim assistance is so much more than dealing with the individual stepping on a mine nor is victim assistance just a matter of medical care.

I will repeat once again: under the definition of a “mine victim” we understand directly affected individuals, their families, and mine-affected communities. So,

consequently, victim assistance needs to be viewed as a wide range of activities that benefit individuals, families and communities and that those needs are often life-long and varied.

In the long-term, the national state carries final responsibility for the well-being of its citizens. But it was acknowledged that this needs to be achieved with support from the international community.

Additionally, mine survivors are part of a larger community of people with injuries and disabilities, and victim assistance efforts should not exclude this larger group, nor should mine victims be excluded from the disability sector. It is also recognized that assistance to mine survivors must be considered in the broader context of development and underdevelopment. It is widely accepted that mine victim assistance should be integrated into poverty reduction strategies and long-term development plans to ensure sustainability to avoid unnecessary segregation of survivors.

Actually, since the MBT entered into force, greater attention has been placed on the importance of accurate and up-to-date data on mine casualties and mine survivors to better understand their needs and to ensure that limited resources are used most effectively where the needs are greatest. In 1999, reports of new mine casualties, albeit limited, were only available for 42 countries. In 2005-2006, new mine casualties were identified in 65 countries and areas, in addition there were ERW casualties in 17 more, totalling 82 countries. The number of casualties augmented compared to previous years, unfortunately this seems to be less and less related to improved data collection than to expansion of conflicts.

Of the 82 countries with new mine/ERW casualties in 2005-2006, 52 had data collection mechanisms. Most (58 percent) of the recorded casualties occurred in States Parties, and 42 percent occurred in non-States Parties or areas not recognized by the UN. Of the casualties in States Parties, 87 percent were recorded in the 24 countries identified as having significant numbers of mine survivors (the "VA 24"). We now know that 39 percent of the casualties in 2005 occurred in just three VA24 countries (Afghanistan, Cambodia, Colombia). Far less is known about casualties in non-States Parties.

One major field of progress for the MBT is that data collection in States Parties is more complete. For example, 60% of complete data collection is in States Parties. Among seven States Parties with no data collection system 244 casualties were reported - three percent of casualties. While in the 13 non-States Parties and areas with no data collection system 1,373 casualties were reported - 19 percent of total casualties. Also, we found that for three percent of the new recorded casualties we did not have any information, not even if they are male or female, dead or injured. However, 89 percent of these unknown casualties were recorded in non-States Parties.

The number of new casualties is only a small indicator of the landmine problem; more important is the number of mine survivors that need and have a right to assistance. It must be remembered that while the number of reported new landmine casualties might be dropping in many mine-affected countries the number of landmine survivors continues to increase. With up to 500,000 mine/ERW survivors in 125 countries in the world it is important that they get a say in matters relating to them.

What matters for victim assistance is the difference it actually makes in peoples' lives. Action #38 of the *Nairobi Action Plan* that emerged from the First Review Conference states that States Parties need to "ensure the effective integration of mine victims in the work of the Convention." At the national level, assessing the needs of *victims* by consulting them directly is an important planning tool to increase efficiency of services. However, many survivors and their organizations continue to indicate that they were not included in planning and policymaking processes, and that they are not consulted on what they perceive as gaps.

The MBT gave us a better understanding of the various types of assistance needed, our Landmine Monitor research since 1999 shows that through the efforts of States Parties, the

ICBL, the ICRC and NGOs in the field, the Mine Ban Treaty has had an impact in raising awareness of the rights and needs of mine survivors and has enabled mine survivors themselves to advocate for services to address their needs. It is now generally accepted that there are six key components to victim assistance:

- Data collection: data collection is absolutely crucial to understand the scale of the problem and any changes in the context and extent of the problem. But we do not only collect data for statistical purposes. If that were the case, casualties would run a high risk of becoming data victims. More importantly, it is understood that data should be collected mainly for planning purposes and that we need differentiated and detailed data collection to be able to do this (as well as the option to expand into disability or injury surveillance mechanisms).
- A second component of VA is emergency and continuing medical care. It is well-known now that rapid response is essential to minimize lasting harm. There also is an increased understanding that specialized medical care needs to be more widely available and that services need to be as close to the community as possible and performed by trained staff.
- Thirdly, physical rehabilitation including services for rehabilitation, physiotherapy and the supply of prosthetics/orthotics and assistive devices. However, there now is an increased understanding that mine survivors are not just amputees, but that there are a wide variety of injuries and disabilities needing physical rehabilitation. Where possible physical rehabilitation should be provided in hospital and at the community-based level and include self-care training principles for families and survivors.
- Whereas psychological and social support have long been neglected, it is now understood that a variety of support mechanisms are needed for survivors and the families of those killed or injured to overcome the psychological trauma of a landmine explosion and promote their social well-being. These activities include community-based peer support groups, associations for the disabled, sporting and related activities, and professional counselling. Peer-to-peer support is provided by many survivors and disability organizations, however, formal support is still stigmatized and often not recognized as essential by the affected states.
- Economic reintegration programs aim to improve the economic status of mine survivors and other people with disabilities and raise awareness so that people with disabilities get equal chances at jobs and services. Economic reintegration includes education, vocational training, creation of employment opportunities, micro-credit schemes, and development of community infrastructure to reflect the local economic reality. For many mine survivors, taking up their roles as productive community members and working for their families' well-being is the most important part of integral rehabilitation. This theme has gained prominence among victim assistance actors and affected states. However, the issue of economic reintegration is complex and in many countries people with disabilities are considered to be a high risk group for many micro-credit schemes.
- Disability legislation and public awareness of disability issues are crucial to guarantee equal rights and acceptance of people with disabilities, including mine survivors, in society. Although many countries have disability legislation, this is often not implemented. However, the UN Disability Convention could prove to be a powerful tool in implementing and reinforcing national disability legislation and initiatives.

Since 1999, in part because of the work of Landmine Monitor in compiling information, a great deal more is now known about facilities and programs that assist mine survivors, and some of the problems they faced. But the extent to which landmine survivors' needs are not being met is generally still unknown. You might wonder why we cannot get a

better idea. Maybe I can clarify with a few stories: one day I had the privilege to go out to the field with our ICBL Ambassador Tun Channareth in Cambodia visiting survivors. While on the motorbike, I felt as if I was literally disappearing off the map, the people we visited lived three hours away from the nearest paved road or visible road, electricity and services. Most people there would not be able to afford transport to the nearest services. To say the least, you have to be persistent to find these mine-affected communities. On another trip, I was in al-Fasher, North Darfur, where the local disabled people's organization counts several mine/ERW survivors among its members, some of them injured elsewhere during the civil war, others injured by ERW in Northern Darfur. But you can imagine that ERW is not exactly a high priority in Darfur and that communications for tiny organizations like these are not always easy. In other words, you only know about many organizations like these when you have the chance to visit them.

More theoretically, there is the issue of beneficiary counting, I have also said before that victim assistance does not only deal with the specific needs of landmine casualties, but the programs have developed to become multi-disciplinary and open to a larger target audience. Equally, victim assistance is getting more integrated in general disability and development programs. On the one hand, this is good because the services will become more sustainable and integrated. But it makes measuring progress indeed more difficult because it involves a multitude of actors and funding that is mainstreamed in the countries' general budget. But there are various indicators that can give us an idea of the extent to which needs are being met.

- Have or are affected states taking steps to develop a plan of action to address the needs of mine survivors, or more generally to improve services for all persons with disabilities. This is where the VA 24 questionnaire helps us a great deal.
- Is there good knowledge of the disability situation and is disability mainstreamed into all aspects of governance? Is it possible to get a budget breakdown of relevant spending?
- Is there a victim assistance or disability focal point in the country with a national overview? In many cases, there is no-one in-country with this specific role and the global overview. This often means that outsiders like the Implementation Support Unit, Landmine Monitor,... seem to have a better - albeit theoretical - overview of what is going on in a country. But they are not able to see the reality on the ground in all countries nor do they know the intricacies of the local context.
- Are there coordination mechanisms at work in the country, whether inter-ministerial, civil society or ideally a mix of both.

After all these years, there are still information exchange issues between those involved: government, UN, ICBL, civil society: victim assistance is not about competition, nor is it a shame to flag up challenges.

Expansion of existing data collection mechanisms and standardization of data collection allows us to track progress better. These data management systems should be integrated in general disability or injury surveillance mechanisms. Let me refer to the Afghanistan National Disability Survey, this survey allows us to understand what percentage of the general disabled population are war victims and how many of those are mine/ERW casualties. It also tells us where they live, if they work and what social challenges they face. This allows us to develop programs targeted at where the needs are the greatest.

Another key issue to understand and track progress better would be increased national reporting on its achievements. The VA24 questionnaire, when used properly, is a good tool to fill the gap where Article 7 transparency reporting stops.

Coordination and network building should speak for themselves, actors should complement each other where ever possible in order to make services more efficient,

especially when looking at limited resources. Small organizations often feel like they are working in isolation, so efforts should be made to pull them in the network.

The twin-track approach is important. Where possible needs of *victims* should be taken care off within the existing public health and social structures, but if necessary special services must exist.

I stress again working according to what the survivors say they need, as it is really crucial to meeting their real needs.

And lastly, let's not forget that victim assistance is, above all, human rights issue.

I will conclude with telling another story, it is the story of Fayz a 21-year-old survivor I met in Lebanon. He has undergone several leg operations and is waiting to receive rehabilitation, psychosocial and educational support. You might think, surely, he is one of the casualties from the recent conflict. Unfortunately, Fayz was injured while herding sheep in the Western Beka'a valley almost 12 years ago and has not received assistance to enable him to overcome his trauma or to return to school ever since. His full details had never been recorded and therefore his needs have largely gone unnoticed. Also in September 2006, together with data collection teams and social workers I visited this young boy, Hassan, injured in September 2006. Thanks to the advances made in understanding by the Mine Ban Treaty he did not slip through the cracks and will hopefully receive the treatment he needs and deserves, even though Lebanon is not even a State Party.