

**Speech: Opening ‘Assisting Landmine Survivors: A Decade
of Efforts’**

Dr Winkler, Commander Schittenhelm, Ambassador Petritsch,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset I would like to thank the Austrian Government for hosting this symposium on ‘Assisting Landmine Survivors: A Decade of Efforts’, which marks the tenth anniversary of the Vienna Meeting on landmines.

Victim assistance is one of the cornerstones of the Mine Ban Convention.

As the first international arms control instrument to address the needs of victims, the Mine Ban Convention obliges states parties to provide assistance for the care and rehabilitation, and social and economic reintegration of mine victims.

For ten years, we have all strived to meet our obligations to survivors.

But despite these efforts, victim assistance remains a critical area of the Convention that requires further focused work.

There are thousands of new casualties every year.

This is a worrying trend after more than a decade of mine action. And it reflects a need for more intensive work in the areas of mine clearance, mine risk education and universalisation.

New casualties mean that each year there are more survivors who require immediate medical and psychological support.

In addition, according to Landmine Monitor, there are already 350,000 to 500,000 mine survivors living in the world today who will need support for the rest of their lives.

And these figures do not reflect the suffering of families and communities affected by the scourge of landmines.

We can't get away from the fact that assistance to mine victims is a life-long commitment for all of us.

What have we achieved?

So how far have we come to meeting the goals we set ourselves in Vienna and since the Convention entered into force?

First, we have better defined the problem.

At the First Review Conference, held in Nairobi in 2004 and presided over by Ambassador Petritsch of Austria, we set out key understandings.

For example, who are victims of landmines? As states parties we now recognise that victims of landmines extend past individual survivors, to families and whole communities.

We understand that the primary responsibility to care for survivors rests with mine-affected states but that donors have an important role to play.

We accept that responses to the problem can not be provided piecemeal but should be integrated into broader development work and poverty reduction strategies.

We also agree to focus our victim assistance efforts not only on landmine survivors but on all people with disabilities. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, recently adopted in New York, will complement and reinforce the work of the Mine Ban Convention in this area.

Secondly, mine-affected and donor states, have been taking practical action to implement the Convention and improve the lives and livelihoods of survivors.

The 24 states with the greatest number of victims have made progress in developing their national plans and objectives.

They have done this working closely with Austria and Sudan as Co-Chairs of the Standing Committee on Victim Assistance of the Mine Ban Convention, as well as with their predecessors Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Norway and Switzerland.

And donors are stepping up to the plate.

Australia increased its financial commitment of \$75 million over five years, with a new Mine Action Strategy launched in 2005.

Reducing the suffering of survivors and supporting their socio-economic rehabilitation is a key objective of the strategy.

Australia provides support through specific survivor assistance programs but also by building broader health infrastructure in mine-affected countries, supporting job creation and education and training.

Australia also works with mine-affected countries to develop national policies and legislation that address the needs of all disabled people.

This year, Australia is set to spend almost half its mine action budget on victim assistance programs.

A significant proportion of those funds will be dedicated to one of the most affected states – Cambodia.

In delivering assistance, Australia works in close collaboration with non-government organisations, such as the ICBL and others. This partnership, between government and civil society, is essential in delivering results.

Thirdly, since the Vienna meeting, survivors have raised their voices on the landmine issue, thanks to organisations like Landmine Survivors Network.

Survivors have been encouraged by the Mine Ban community to increase their participation on government and non-government delegations at Convention meetings.

Their self-empowerment is essential to ensure their reintegration and participation in mine-affected societies.

But, as always, further challenges lie ahead.

Challenges ahead?

According to Landmine Monitor, existing victim assistance programs in the field do not go far enough to meet the needs of survivors. This is across the board: in the areas of rehabilitation, psychological support, socio-economic reintegration and rights implementation.

And there remain continued and serious gaps in victim data collection, which reflects problems with national capacity, and in turn affects a states' ability to undertake effective planning.

States parties have developed a strategic response to this through the Convention.

We have the Nairobi Action Plan, which outlines concrete actions for both affected and donor states ahead of the Second Review Conference in 2009.

We have a well-structured intersessional work program on victim assistance, which is helping affected states to develop plans and meet objectives.

And we have an excellent Implementation Support Unit, which continues to provide valuable one-on-one support to affected

states, through its victim assistance expert, who Australia is proud to support.

But we must be clear. Plans are not sufficient. We must continue to implement the Convention in practical ways on the ground. The long-term credibility of the Convention depends on this.

Mine-affected states must continue to advance the rights of survivors and provide for their health and socio-economic needs.

Donors have to ensure that funding levels reflect the long-term nature of survivor needs, while ensuring that their efforts help affected states develop sustainable, effective and efficient national systems of care.

Australia is committed to doing this, as the President, as a state party to the Convention and as a donor.

This symposium provides us with a useful opportunity to tackle the key remaining problems.

I wish everyone a successful meeting.