

**PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS
COMMITTEE ON VICTIM ASSISTANCE
(Belgium, Croatia, Ecuador and Mozambique)**

Intersessional Meetings 7-8 June 2018

Observations of the Committee on the information submitted by Serbia

1. The Committee welcomes the submission by Serbia of its Article 7 report for the calendar year 2017 containing updated information on its victim assistance activities. Based on the information provided, the Committee presents the following preliminary observations.

Mine casualties

2. The Committee observed that Serbia had not reported on the status of new mine casualties and welcomes an update on casualties in 2017, and the total number of mine victims, disaggregated by sex and age.

Assessment of needs, the availability and gaps in services (Action #12)

3. The Committee observed that Serbia reported that a Working Group on Victims Assistance was in place with the necessary authorization and funding to undertake all necessary actions for the benefit of victims, including mapping of existing services. The Committee welcomes additional information, disaggregated by sex- and age, on efforts to assess the needs of mine victims.

Time-bound and measurable objectives (Action #13)

4. The Committee observed that Serbia reported that the 2007-2015 strategy on disabilities was in force and that a new strategy was in the process of adoption. Serbia reported that the status and the rights of disabled veterans and civilian war victims will be equal to those of persons with disabilities in the new strategy. In addition, the report includes a set of activities pursued by the Working Group on Victim Assistance in promoting assistance to mine victims, as follows:
 - a. Proposing measures to enhance the place of the victims of anti-personal mines;
 - b. Proposing measures to enhance the legislative framework for the protection of the anti-personnel mine victims;
 - c. Monitoring alignment with the applicable legislation regulating the protection of mines victims with international and national laws;
 - d. Proposing special programmes and measures to empower mines victims;
 - e. Cooperation with the associations of mine victims and civil society; organizations involved in enhancement of victim assistance;
 - f. Cooperation with relevant institutions from abroad, international organizations and national working groups of the equivalent or similar profile with a view to exchanging experience and good practices;
 - g. Monitoring progress regarding the provision of victim assistance within wider national plans and legal framework, and;
 - h. Mapping all the existing services.
5. The Committee encourages Serbia to develop the above objectives into a time-bound and measurable plan of action on victim assistance.

Enhancement in the integration of victim assistance into broader frameworks, including allocation of budgets for their implementations (Actions #14)

6. The Committee observed that Serbia was acting upon its commitments to integrate victim assistance into broader frameworks, by reporting the followings:
 - a. Development of an inclusive membership to the Working Group on Victim Assistance (WGVA), with representations from the Ministries of Labour, Employment and Social Policy, Foreign Affairs, Defence, Health, Education, Science and Technological Development and Mine Action Centre of Serbia. In addition to these entities, the WGVA includes representatives from employment, gender equality, disabilities, cooperation and inclusive education domains of member ministries in the Working Group. NGOs are also expected to participate in the activities of the Group;
 - b. The Department for Antidiscrimination Policy and Promotion of Gender Equality was established within the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs in 2017, to monitor enforcement of the anti-discriminatory policy and advance gender equality in cooperation with civil society, and;
 - c. The WGVA works with relevant ministries and institutions to promote victim assistance, including by monitoring progress in the implementation of victim assistance within wider national plans and legal framework.

Increase availability of and accessibility to rehabilitation services, economic inclusion opportunities and social protection measures for all mine victims, regardless of their gender and age (Action #15)

7. The Committee observed that Serbia is implementing aspects of Action 15, by reporting as follows:
 - a. Efforts by the WGVA and the Antidiscrimination Department to increase availability and access to services, especially through coordination efforts and policy work, and;
 - b. All municipalities in Serbia have services for the protection of veterans and the disabled that can be contacted by disabled civilian veterans for specific types of assistance.
8. The Committee welcomes information on the results of those efforts among mine victims, and their access to services, regardless of their gender and age.

Strengthen local capacities and enhance coordination (Action #15)

9. The Committee observed that Serbia was acting upon aspects of requirements under Action 15, by reporting on significant plans and activities of the Working Group on Victim Assistance concerning coordination of policies and programmes on victim assistance, including agreeing on the need for stronger coordination between victims and government. The report also indicated that capacity building was one of the activities undertaken by NGOs with financial aids provided by the Serbian government.

Inclusion and participation of mine victims (Actions #16)

10. The Committee observed that Serbia reported on the participation of NGOs in activities of the Working Group on Victim Assistance, and welcomes further information on inclusion and active participation of mine survivors.

Removing barriers and raising awareness (Actions #15 and #17)

11. The Committee observed that Serbia reported on efforts to remove barriers, such as through enhanced measures for gender equality and anti-discrimination, social protection services in

remote and rural areas to expand social welfare quality assistance, and welcomes additional information on targeted efforts raising awareness on the rights and needs of mine victims.

Measurable improvements, challenges, and priorities for assistance in advance of the next Review Conference (Action #18)

12. The Committee observed that Serbia reported plans and objectives for an improved victim assistance programme, and would encourage Serbia to identify remaining challenges, priorities and increase efforts in order to achieve the objectives of the Actions 12 to 18 of the Maputo Action Plan, by the upcoming Review Conference.