

MAKING A DIFFERENCE ON THE GROUND

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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON VICTIM ASSISTANCE
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Co-Chairs, Excellencies, dear friends,

It is not normal for the ISU to engage in the substantive discussions that take place during the meetings of the Standing Committees.

However, on the matter of making a difference on the ground as concerns victim assistance, the ISU has many views to share that may be of benefit for delegations.

The ISU has been involved since 2005 in assisting States Parties in applying the understandings adopted on victim assistance.

We began this form of implementation support given the richness of decisions on victim assistance that were adopted by the States Parties at the 2004 First Review Conference, or Nairobi Summit on a Mine-Free World.

At the Nairobi Summit, the States Parties formally recorded understandings that provided a basis for them to act strategically on victim assistance.

Moreover, these understandings amount to the foundation on which the broader approach to victim assistance in all conventional weapons instruments was built.

In 2004, the States Parties defined “victim” and “victim assistance” and correctly noted that providing for the well-being and guaranteeing the rights of one’s population is a national responsibility, albeit in many cases one that requires assistance to fulfil.

The States Parties also recognized that the actions necessary to assist the victims are those that typically would be the responsibility of state entities and professional domains that have existed for decades, such as health care, physical rehabilitation, psychological support, vocational training and the defence of human rights.

In 2005, the ISU supported the then Co-Chairs of the Standing Committee on Victim Assistance, Nicaragua and Norway, in promoting the application of these understandings by States Parties with an emphasis on the strategic application of victim assistance to how the Convention permits a strategic approach to demining and stockpile destruction.

The key to being strategic is knowing your destination and spelling out a plan of how to get there.

While our overall mission is clear – the full and effective participation of landmine survivors in society on an equal basis with others – being strategic means spelling out one’s destination, or the change that one wants to see, in a narrow, precise, tangible, and concrete way and in terms that lend themselves to being validated.

Objectives need to be established that are SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound.

The effort that began in 2005 to promote the identification of SMART objectives was probably the first time that the issue of measurability was introduced in the realm of landmine victim assistance.

To our surprise, we encountered some critique of this effort, with some suggesting that it was wasting time on yet another victim assistance process when what was really needed was to make a difference on the ground.

In response to our critics, we would respond by asking: Specifically what difference is expected? Over what time period? Is it achievable? And how will it be measured?

Those who doubted our efforts invariably did not have answers to these questions. This simply validated the importance of our work.

Another question that was asked in 2005, and for which we had a clear answer, was: Who establishes objectives?

Given that it's simply a fact in the international system and in keeping with the United Nations Charter that "matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any State" are the responsibility of the State in question, establishing objectives for the well-being and the guarantee of the rights of one's population is a national responsibility.

To varying degrees since 2005 States Parties have developed SMART victim assistance objectives, and many have developed plans – including plans that embed victim assistance in the broader context of disability – to achieve these objectives.

Imperfections notwithstanding, the efforts of many States Parties have advanced victim assistance to a level that had never existed before.

Some of these States Parties have been criticized for what these critics pejoratively refer to as "process gains".

Clearly the establishment of objectives and the development of plans are not substitutes for actually making a difference on the ground.

However, the first main observation that I wish to share with you is that without determining a measurable, time-bound destination and without developing a plan to arrive at this destination, success, or lack thereof, will be a constantly moveable and ambiguous target.

The second observation I would make about the measurability of our efforts is that we are not starting from scratch when it comes to understanding how we might identify the outputs and outcomes of our efforts and whether or not we are making an impact.

Expert organizations like Handicap International, which have played such an instrumental role in realizing and implementing this Convention, have worked for decades in supporting persons with disabilities to acquire or recover their autonomy and their dignity within their communities.

Organizations like these, in appealing for funds to do their good work, no doubt must produce logical frameworks, validate their intended targets and report to donors on whether the projected difference on the ground in fact became an actual difference on the ground.

For their part, donors no doubt insist on the use of logical frameworks and demand that reports be furnished by expert organizations.

We could benefit greatly, not only in understanding how such expert organizations and donors measure what difference they are making or funding, but also in understanding what difference has actually been made.

The third observation that I would make is that while it is safe to say that more must be done – after all, even in the most developed countries much more must be done to ensure “the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities in society on an equal basis with others”ⁱ – it is not fair to assume that no difference has been made.

The final documents of the Cartagena Summit recorded that, between 2004 and 2008, more than US\$ 230 million was generated by seven leading actors for the care, rehabilitation and reintegration of landmine survivors and other persons with disabilities and for the advancement and guarantee of their rights.ⁱⁱ

Some difference had to have been made with an investment of US\$ 230 million. Can we not learn more regarding what this difference has been?

The fourth and final observation that I would share is that we, as a community of actors supporting the implementation of this and other conventional weapons instruments cannot dodge an important but challenging question.

This may be overlooked because it is but one of many questions that have been posed by the Co-Chairs. It is, though, the most important. This question is

- Given the recognition made by the States Parties in Cartagena that achieving progress in making a tangible difference on the ground “is complicated by the broader set of complex challenges that face most developing countries”, what can realistically be expected from the Convention and what is beyond our reach?ⁱⁱⁱ

Let us be clear: No one in this room is walking away from our ultimate promise – the full and effective participation of landmine survivors in society on an equal basis with others.

But let us be equally clear, to borrow the words of the Cartagena Summit, that given that accomplishing this mission “is complicated by the broader set of complex challenges that face most developing countries”, this Convention cannot do it alone.

Yes, this Convention has a role to play, and an important one.

But assuring, for example, that employment opportunities exist for all, or that adequate health and rehabilitation services exist, concerns variables – such as the rate of economic growth, the distribution of wealth, good governance, rule of law, et cetera – that are beyond our control and beyond what one could ever expect a convention banning anti-personnel mines to address.

We must, therefore, as human beings that care, not be content as long as we have not yet achieved the full and effective participation of landmine survivors and other persons with disabilities in society on an equal basis with others.

Equally, though, we must take some satisfaction when we achieve, what in measurable and time-bound ways, is determined to be this convention's particular contribution to this profound mission.

ⁱ This phrase, which in this or an adapted form appears throughout this statement, has been drawn from the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

ⁱⁱ Final Report of the Second Review Conference of the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, Part II, Appendix VIII, Table 6.

ⁱⁱⁱ Final Report of the Second Review Conference of the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, Part II, Paragraph 122.