

The Principle and Practice of Inclusion
Deepening Survivor Participation in the
Implementation of the Mine Ban Treaty

***Presented by Jerry White, Director, Landmine Survivors Network,
Chair, ICBL Working Group on Victim Assistance***

***Meeting of the Standing Committee on Victim Assistance, Socio-Economic
Reintegration and Mine Awareness
Intersessional Work Programme 2000-2001***

December 4, 2000, Geneva, Switzerland

Those of you who know me know that I have a passion for this subject—for the inclusion of landmine survivors in everything that concerns us. I acquired my passion the day I stepped on a landmine in 1984 in Israel. I am convinced we can build a cadre of trained “survivor advocates” to strengthen the monitoring and implementation of the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty.

My commitment to the principle and practice of inclusion only grows with each survivor I meet and have the privilege of working with around the world. At LSN projects in six countries, 70 percent of our employees are survivors or persons with disabilities.

What we have done so far in the Intersessional Work of the Mine Ban Treaty is to **spotlight** survivors, to include them in person, up front, on stage, in the media, behind the podium... but mostly for the emotional and educational impact of the survivors’ personal testimonies. There has been a strong symbolic value in this process.

If you attended the Second Meeting of States Parties in Geneva in September, you will remember the emotion that cracked the voices of several survivors as they told their stories to the assembly of 500 people at the Palais des Nations. Even if you did not attend that particular event, you can imagine that it is not easy or enjoyable to stand up and tell one’s personal hardships to a room full of strangers.

So why do we do it? Experience and research show that telling one’s story has the power to heal unlike any treatment or therapy. But that’s not the only reason why we do it. When survivors get together we develop bonds based on a set of common experiences that transcend any other bond. This provides good social support; but that’s not why we do it. We do it because we think it will help the cause of landmine victims around the world. We expect that when you hear our stories you will be reminded of the human faces behind the complex issues we are all working to impact. We expect that our stories will make you want to continue to strive to achieve the goals we have set for ourselves but which sometimes seem so distant. We do it so you will remember that your words and your actions will have tangible consequences for real people.

You may recall that it was the call to action from survivors at the June 1997 landmine conference in Brussels, Belgium, that focused Treaty drafters on the need to include

humanitarian provisions to address the needs of mine victims. Largely due to the work of survivors supported by the ICBL and legal counsel, the Ban Treaty calls on governments to provide for the “care and rehabilitation and social and economic reintegration of mine victims.”

I hear, occasionally, that putting victims in the spotlight makes some people uncomfortable. And I ask: “Is this a bad thing?” If you feel uncomfortable, could it be that you are fearful of the horror you would feel if this happened to you, or to a loved one? Might you feel that losing your limbs is worse than losing your life? If you feel uncomfortable, could it be that you feel ashamed that the suffering continues, unnecessarily, unrelentingly, intolerably? Or are you uncomfortable because you empathize with the survivors, having gone through some form of trauma yourself... Whatever the reason, I say, “Uncomfortable? Fine with us.”

We hope that you are also inspired. Inspired by the courage and the commitment and the tenacity of the survivors who have been spotlighted. Survivors tend to be strong people, and we plan to make a difference as representatives of hundreds of thousands of people like us... the great majority whose voices go unheard.

So we will continue to make sure the international community is reminded of the stories of individuals who have been traumatized by this weapon... we will continue to spotlight the details of lives that have been shattered, of people who in a split second are left with deep and long-lasting physical, psychological, social, and economic scars. But we need to go further.

Having completed one full cycle of intersessional work, it is now time to move beyond spotlighting victims to a stronger, deeper, tougher kind of inclusion. **It is time to put the spotlight in the hands of landmine victims.** For a few minutes, I’d like to explain why. Later, my colleague Becky Jordan will talk about the how we can do this with a practical proposal for consideration by this Standing Committee on Victim Assistance.

Why take inclusion to a deeper level?

Inclusion helps prevent egregious mistakes. Looking at the issue of victim assistance through the eyes of persons with disability can shed light on the path ahead. We propose to deepen our commitment to inclusion because we need more individuals involved in the **substance** of the landmine issues. Landmine victims are, as a group, not typically in positions of power or decision-making. They need to be proactively brought into the processes in which decisions about them are being made. It is their right, and it is to our advantage also—to get on board the group of people who care most about the outcomes of our work. This is parallel to the case with women, religious and ethnic minorities, other vulnerable groups. Do you think women around the globe would have made any progress toward ensuring their human rights if women had not been key actors in the movement?

For the most part, inclusion of persons with disability in the Mine Ban process happens on an ad hoc basis. Personally, I am in a position as a survivor in the United States to advocate at home and abroad. But you know I am not an average survivor. I come from a background of financial security. I had a good education, and I received excellent rehabilitation services in those crucial hours just after my injury. I had the most supportive family one could hope for, and good prospects for my future BEFORE my accident. I thank all the powers that be that I

and a few other key people were allowed to advocate for the rights of all landmine survivors from the early days of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines. My example of being directly implicated and therefore deeply involved in all aspects of landmine related issues should be replicated to some degree in all mine-affected countries. But this will not happen by accident or by any natural process in the near future unless we facilitate the process of inclusion.

Another strong reason to facilitate deeper inclusion of landmine victims is that the decisions we make and the actions we take will more likely be on target if the process includes the major stakeholders.

Finally, I believe we need to deepen the inclusion of landmine victims to counteract the typical, human reaction to persons with disability, which is often exclusion; we need to make inclusion a conscious, undeniable choice. It should be at the core of victim assistance efforts.

But you don't have to take my word for it alone. There are many high-level precedents and endorsements of the concept of inclusion.

In the 1993 UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, which is one of the most widely respected document on disability issues, Rules 2, 3, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20, 21, and 22 state that persons with disabilities and their organizations should be directly involved in conceptualizing, planning, formulating, organizing, researching, developing, monitoring, and evaluating programs, services, and agencies that have any relationship to or potential impact of persons with disability.

Rule 22- States should ensure that the United Nations and the specialized agencies, as well as intergovernmental and inter-parliamentary bodies, at global and regional levels, include in their work the global and regional organizations of persons with disabilities.

(By the way, anyone who would like a copy of the Standard Rules can find them on-line at <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/dissre00.htm>)

Other examples of global standards, programmatic guidelines, and disability advocacy include:

- The World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly at its 37th regular session on Dec 3, 1982.
- The ESCAP Asia Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, which calls for national coordination committees on disability with representation from concerned government agencies, and non-governmental organizations, including adequate representation from organizations of people with disabilities.
- World Health Organization guidelines on Community Based Rehabilitation.

I now turn the microphone over to my colleague, Becky Jordan, who will propose a practical way forward to incorporate the principle and practice of inclusion in our work to implement the Mine Ban Treaty.