

Statement
on Victim Assistance and Socio-Economic Reintegration
by
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Co-Chairs,
Distinguished Delegates,

At the outset, I wish to join previous delegations in expressing our sincere appreciation for the efforts of the Co-Chairs in coordinating with the States Parties in preparing for this Meeting of the Standing Committee on Victim Assistance and Socio-Economic Reintegration. I believe that this meeting will bring about a constructive and fruitful outcome which will provide us with guidance for the implementation and achievement of landmine victim assistance along the lines of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention.

As a country in which humanitarian principles lie so close to our hearts, Thailand attaches high priority to the issue of assisting landmine victims. This issue is an integral part of Thailand's comprehensive health policy and provision of services for persons with disabilities. During the past year alone, there have been several continual improvements shown in various aspects of victim assistance. These developments are evident from the ever-increasing unified cooperation among agencies concerned and the well-organized structure of each agency, bringing about the progress of victim assistance in the context of Thailand.

In this regard, we would like to share with you today a review of what we have achieved to date.

Co-Chairs,

The Thai Agencies concerned have become increasingly familiar with the issue of landmine victim assistance under the framework of the Convention. To their understanding, the responsibility for assisting landmine victims must gain support from all relevant agencies so as to be a collective effort. In doing so, all agencies have come to realize that certain mechanisms must be put in place to assist and facilitate landmine victims from the first step, which is the handling of emergencies and giving of ongoing medical care, all the way through to the so-called final step of providing support in terms of social and economic assistance so that they can reintegrate into the society with self-confidence and dignity.

To this end, it should be noted that over the past year, there exists a stronger network of coordination in Thailand among the agencies concerned under the existing National Sub-Committee on Landmine Victim Assistance, led by the Ministry of Public Health, not to mention a clearer coordinated work plan to implement their policy.

In short, Thailand's Plan of Action to fulfill the Master Plan for Mine Victim Assistance 2007 – 2011 has been realized jointly for the first time by the efforts of all relevant authorities under the National Sub-Committee on Victim Assistance. The copies of this new work plan will be distributed for your information during this meeting.

Thailand also has available a reliable health service infrastructure, including a system of emergency medical care services and has placed emphasis on maintaining quality standards and effectiveness. In March of this year, the Narenthorn Bureau of Emergency Medical Services, which is in charge of providing primary emergency services to the landmine survivors, was transformed into the National Emergency Medical Services Institute. The main objectives for this restructuring was to enhance the effectiveness of both material resources and personnel as well as to exercise the expansion of emergency response teams to cover landmine victims in the mine-risk areas of the country.

One other characteristic rather unique to the Thai health service infrastructure is the availability of National Health Volunteers, comprising 80,000 villagers who have joined the emergency response team on a voluntary basis and who can greatly contribute to the work of the first responder as they have been trained in first aid and psychological support. Together, these emergency response teams work closely with both the

Humanitarian Mine Action Unit and provincial/district hospitals in the area to provide assistance to mine victims.

Greater emphasis has also been placed on the physical rehabilitation aspect of victim assistance. Both private and public hospitals in Thailand provide rehabilitation services to people with disabilities, including landmine victims. Furthermore, a policy of 'proactive services in prosthetics and orthopedics free of charge' works to reach those people with disabilities, including landmine victims in remote areas throughout the country. It has been adopted by at least two leading medical rehabilitation agencies; the Sirindhorn National Medical Rehabilitation Centre and the Prostheses Foundation of the late Her Royal Highness the Princess Mother situated in the provinces of Nonthaburi and Chiang Mai respectively.

In addition, appropriate training for rehabilitation specialists has been made available, to ensure the development of adequate human resources in the field of physical rehabilitation. The Sirindhorn National Medical Rehabilitation Centre reports that training in physical medicine and rehabilitation is provided in 7 hospitals nationwide, and approximately 35 rehabilitation specialists are trained each year.

We would also like to point out that several agencies concerned are working hand-in-hand to ensure that landmine victims, as well as their families are treated appropriately and receive the proper psychological support and guidance suited to their needs and status of living, to assist in their social re-integration. A strategy of Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) has also been introduced and is now widely recognized. The focal agency on this matter is the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security who works in close collaboration with the Sirindhorn National Medical Rehabilitation Centre. Through this strategy, Thailand has emphasized strengthening the skills of health personnel for working with persons with disabilities and the community. As a result, a number of self-help groups for persons with disabilities have been established in certain communities as well.

Co-Chairs,

When it comes to the final step of providing support to landmine victims in terms of economic reintegration, landmine victims in Thailand have thorough access to vocational training and other related activities in the

same manner as other persons with disabilities. In this respect, the Department of Skill Development of the Ministry of Labour is on hand to provide and offer, without discrimination, various training programs for persons with disabilities, in the mine-affected communities/provinces.

Apart from this, the Department of Skill Development has also provided mobile vocational training for these people, which acts as an outreach to those living in remote areas. These units are set up in every province and have become more and more relevant as well as beneficial to those persons with disabilities, including landmine survivors.

Lastly, concerning the establishment, enforcement and implementation of the relevant laws and public policies, significant developments could be observed during the past year. The Bureau of the Empowerment for Persons with Disabilities was established under the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security's supervision. This Bureau was authorized to deal particularly with persons with disabilities.

In line with this, the "Rehabilitation for Persons with Disabilities Act (1991)" was also replaced by a newer legislation, the "Act to Develop the Quality of Life of Persons with Disabilities (2007)". All these ongoing developments are part of our efforts to reaffirm Thailand's commitment to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which Thailand signed last year. All plans and actions within this Convention framework are definitely beneficial to the landmine survivors.

Co-Chairs,

Looking back on our past experiences on victim assistance, Thailand has learnt that this issue requires not only dedication but also a humanitarian heart. As this is a process which involves the lives of the most unfortunate, it needs the joint cooperation and responsibility of all components of society to ensure that these innocent people can once again become self-reliant and contributing members of society.

With this fact in mind, Thailand has implemented a so-called "comprehensive landmine victims database collection project", to be conducted from July 2008 to April 2009, in a combined effort to systemize the registration system and accounting of landmine victims in the country, including information on the care and rehabilitation received. The result of

this survey will be further utilized as a basis for concerned authorities to conduct a more systemized and coordinated future work plan and implementation method for landmine victim assistance.

On a side note, we would like to provide an update on the number of landmine victims in Thailand, which has significantly decreased during the past few years. From 2006 up to this date, there has not been any further loss of lives and only a few accounts of mine accidents annually, which is a direct reflection of the tireless efforts in the area of Mine Risk Education from all the agencies concerned in the country, both governmental and non-governmental. I would like to add, however, that although we are pleased that the number of casualties caused by landmines has decreased, we cannot be completely satisfied until there is not a single casualty caused by this problem.

In conclusion, Thailand would like to reiterate its determination to better develop its victim assistance programme, and to constantly improve its efforts and approach to fulfill our commitments under the Mine Ban Convention. We are ready to enhance cooperation and assist the States Parties, both in the implementation of victim assistance programs at the national level and the work plan in place. We will continue to be committed to this noble endeavor as far as our capacity permits. Lastly, we are grateful for the input and collaboration rendered by the international community especially through civil society and NGOs since the very beginning.

Thank you.

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