

Thank you, Madam Chair, and at the outset we would like to thank you for providing us with this opportunity for a focused discussion on international cooperation and assistance.

Austria fully associates itself with the statement delivered by the European Union earlier today. Allow me to add more specific comments, in particular on Victim Assistance.

Madam Chair, we have read your discussion paper on cooperation and assistance as concerns victim assistance with great interest and would like to thank you for this valuable input. We believe that you captured many of the prevailing notions in our community quite accurately. Ten years after the entry into force of the Mine Ban Convention, we might have refined our understanding of victim assistance but can be far from content with the results its implementation is yielding on the ground.

Last autumn the Austrian Federal Minister for European and International Affairs, Michael Spindelegger, launched a study entitled "Voices from the Ground" here in Geneva. Many of you were present on that occasion and most of you are aware of its content. This systematic survey of survivors in affected countries revealed once again that there has been progress, in particular in the area of emergency and continuing medical care, but only 28% of the respondents believed that overall services were better in 2009 than in 2005. There is only one possible answer to this: much more needs to be done.

Austria is among those countries who have dedicated a specific percentage of our "mine action funding" for victim assistance for exactly this reason, to ensure that the most vulnerable parts of the population in already war-torn societies and developing countries are not forgotten. In 2010, 35% of the Austrian Mine Action Funding will be dedicated to Victim Assistance.

Madam Chair, you highlighted the importance of coordination in your paper, as contained in Action #24 of the Cartagena Action Plan. We were encouraged to hear from affected States this week about their efforts to increase coordination and improve communication and cooperation between all relevant actors. The same is undoubtedly true for donor countries. Let me name one example, the victim assistance expert-conference which I introduced yesterday, was a joint-initiative of both the Austrian Ministry of Defense and the Ministry for European and International Affairs. At the same time, we are closely working together with the Austrian Development Agency and are currently elaborating a new Mine Action Strategy, starting from 2011.

When we speak about victim assistance, and while recognizing that affected States bear the ultimate responsibility, we speak about a concerted effort and we therefore very much welcome this Special Session and we hope to find jointly answers to the questions which you so eloquently put into your discussion paper, Madam Chair.

In concluding, allow me another comment in reaction to yesterday's session. Paragraph 10 in your Discussion Paper names associations of landmine survivors and disabled persons organizations as important stakeholders, in particular through their awareness-raising and advocacy. In this context, I would also like to thank Mr. White for his inspiring presentation yesterday afternoon and add my voice to those who already talked about the important contribution of peer support.

Thank you, Madam Chair.