

Victim Assistance

Let me begin by thanking the Co-Chairs for their excellent preparations for this Standing Committee meeting. Australia was privileged to attend the very useful workshop on victim assistance on Friday and Saturday.

Let me also thank those states with responsibility for a significant number of landmine victims for their presentations today.

Australia takes our cooperation and assistance obligations under the Convention very seriously. While we support the Mine Ban Convention principle that affected States bear primary responsibility for clearance and victim assistance, we nonetheless believe that these states should not have to bear this responsibility alone.

Survivor assistance is a fundamental component of Australia's mine action program. Since 2004, we have supported a number of the 26 states parties with responsibility for significant numbers of victims, including Afghanistan, Cambodia, Iraq, Angola and Uganda. Many projects we fund, in line with partner government priorities, are based on integrated approaches to mine action aimed at improving livelihoods of survivors, their families and their communities.

Australia gives priority to the integration of landmines and explosive remnants of war survivor services into existing healthcare, social services and disability-inclusive development policy frameworks. In doing so, we can improve the efficiency and impact of our victim assistance efforts and ensure sustainability.

This financial year, Australia expects to contribute over A\$7 million to support survivor assistance activities (including integrated mine action), in countries such as Cambodia, Laos and Iraq. We are also proud to contribute to the ICRC Special Fund for the Disabled in Vietnam for the third year in 2009.

We will continue our funding for the Victim Assistance Expert position of the ISU. And may I take this opportunity to thank you, Sheree, for your vital work in this position for the past years.

Australia's support for landmine survivors will be further enhanced through a new disability strategy for the aid program, *Development for All*, announced in 2008. The strategy reflects a commitment to social inclusion and accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. It is framed in the context of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, to which Australia is party.

The strategy focuses on improving the quality of life of people with disability and the inclusion of people with disability across all aspects of the aid program – this incorporates the needs of survivors of landmines and other explosive remnants of war. The strategy is not intended as a stand alone initiative, rather, it will change the way that AusAID works so that *all* AusAID programs will eventually take into account the needs of people with disability, and address them through disability-inclusive development assistance.

Mr Co-Chairs

We now have complementary provisions on victim assistance and survivor rights under this Convention, CCW Protocol V on Explosive Remnants of War, the new Convention on Cluster Munitions and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Australia is proudly associated with all four instruments.

As Coordinator on Victim Assistance under Protocol V, Australia believes it is essential that the implementation of these instruments is closely coordinated so as to ensure effective and efficient assistance to survivors and minimise administrative burdens.

We thank the Co-Chairs Thailand and Belgium for their close cooperation with us as Coordinator under Protocol V and look forward to coordinating closely our work in the future.

In conclusion, Australia would like to pay tribute to Colombia and Norway for their decision to place survivor assistance on the top of the agenda for the Review Conference. You have our full support in the lead up to Cartagena to ensure that assistance to landmine survivors remains a Convention priority.