

**Intersessional Standing Committee Meetings
Geneva, 25-29 May 2009**

Voices from the Ground update (HI-Belgium)

Thank you for your interest in Voices from the Ground and for giving us the opportunity to inform the plenary about this inspiring project which Handicap International-Belgium is conducting for the International Campaign to Ban Landmines. Firstly, we would like to thank Austria and Norway, whose continued support has made this project possible.

The Mine Ban Treaty offered the fundamental promise to end the human suffering caused by antipersonnel mines. The Second Review Conference is the time to see how affected states and the international community have, as they committed to in Nairobi, done their utmost to fulfil this promise to improve the lives of hundreds of thousands of survivors, their families and communities. Who better to ask than those directly experiencing the human consequences of mines every day?

We hoped to collect responses from 500 survivors in the so-called VA26 countries. This is roughly 25 per country, which at first glance may seem like a small sample. But as we all know, most survivors and their families live in remote areas; have to work hard for their daily sustenance; and many do not even have electricity or access to education to learn to read and write. So, this was not a simple matter of sending an email and waiting for a response.

Dozens of people from the ICBL, the ICRC and its national societies, NGOs, DPOs, survivor organizations and interested individuals volunteered to go to faraway places to interview survivors in addition to their already busy jobs. We estimate that 500 questionnaires equals about 2,000 hours of volunteer work and survivor participation.

I am very happy but also humbled to say that since March we have collected more than 1,000 questionnaires in 24 of the 26 countries and more could come in. A more significant message is that some survivors have contacted us directly to ask if they could also complete a questionnaire.

We know that we cannot reach every survivor, their family or community. But the assessment of progress and recommendations from those at the forefront of implementation should take the center-stage in any discussion about ensuring effective and sustainable victim assistance in the future.

Although we will only publish the report on 2 September in Vienna, some suggestions for the development of the Cartagena action plan have emerged.

Clearly, survivors want to see a concrete improvement to their lives and that of their families and communities. This is exactly what many people here have also been working towards for years and will continue to do so in the future. But there is a disconnect...

Survivors often responded that they felt that, in the past five years, service provision remained the same and largely inadequate. Worryingly, many feared that their situation

might get worse in the next five years, for example due to isolation, getting older, no longer believing in promises, or the economic crisis. Similarly, a practitioner whose organization has assisted tens of thousands of people a year for two decades in just one country had this to say: "coordination has improved but overall service provision has stayed at the same inadequate level since 2005."

From this we can distil the first and most important line of action for the Cartagena action plan: rendering timely and comprehensive services and rights when and where someone needs them. Objectives to accomplish this line of action apply to all components of victim assistance, such as access, quality, effectiveness, sustainability and equal victim participation.

We can see that over the past five years planning and coordination were required to facilitate implementation. This would constitute the second line of action with objectives such as political will, awareness, coordination, budgeting, monitoring and reporting, sustainability and equal victim participation.

Financial and technical support, as well as guidelines for supporting agencies would form a third line of action concerning international cooperation.

The responses indicate that an action plan needs to be structured so that it is possible to measure progress. Under the lines of action there need to be clear objectives as well as specific, measurable, and timely, if not time-bound, actions states commit to take and report progress against. There is no need for laundry lists of tasks to be achieved under each component of victim assistance. The standards of other legal frameworks, particularly the CRPD and CCM can easily be built into such a plan, creating vital synergies. For the Mine Ban Treaty, it is not important under which strategy victims receive assistance, as long as states can demonstrate that victims are assisted through these.

The best way to thank the countless people participating in Voices from the Ground is, as Tun Channareth said, to focus on implementation, implementation, implementation, of a measurable action plan in the next five years. So that we can finally move beyond the cliché of "progress is being made, but more needs to be done."