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This year we celebrate the fifteenth anniversary of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention and we do have things to celebrate from the Victim Assistance point of view. The Mine Ban Convention set a precedent in incorporating a legal obligation to assist victims and survivors, no matter how tentative, into an international instrument governing conventional weapons. What a long road it has been since the First State Parties Meeting! Over the years the concept of Victim Assistance has been defined and the work done under this Convention has served as the basis for how other international conventional weapons instruments have dealt with assisting the victims, such as the CCW Protocol V and Convention on Cluster Munitions. While there is a lot to celebrate, we should not forget that work still needs to be done to achieve the promises of the Convention.

While the Convention's preventive measures have undoubtedly saved many thousands of lives, most mine victims have yet to see a significant improvement in their lives. In the countries where the ICRC is working, and we are working in 19 of the 28 States Parties that have reported responsibility for a significant numbers of survivors, survivors and other persons with disabilities are still facing several barriers that hamper their full inclusion in their societies. Inadequate policies, lack of provision of services, problems with service delivery, inadequate funding to implement policies and plans, and lack of accessibility are among these barriers.

The States Parties responsible for significant numbers of landmine survivors include some of the poorest countries on earth and achieving progress is complicated by the broader set of complex challenges that most developing countries face. Progress could nevertheless continue to be made if ALL States Parties to the Convention renewed and strengthened their commitment to achieving the aims of the Convention. In some countries, it will probably take longer than in others, but we believe it is an attainable objective as long as we all working in the same direction.

In addition to renewed commitment, increased political support is needed in affected States to ensure the effective implementation of policies and plans, to allocate more resources (both financial and human) and to promote an inclusive society.

We also believe that as available resources are limited, it is necessary to foster closer synergies in regards of Victim Assistance within the Mine Ban Convention, the CCW Protocol V and the Convention on Cluster Munitions to ensure a more efficient use of resources.

Developments under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities will also be important for these Conventions but must complement the fulfilment of specific commitments made under the weapons Conventions to support survivors, their affected families and communities.

Mr President, as I mentioned at the beginning of my statement, we do have many things to celebrate. However, it is important that we continue the work to see concrete improvements in the lives of survivors each year.

Over the years, the ICRC, through its Physical Rehabilitation Programme and through its Special Fund for the Disabled, has provided assistance in nearly all of the most affected countries, both States Parties and non-States Parties to the Convention. This assistance has allowed several thousands of survivors to regain mobility, which is an important step towards enjoying such basic rights as access to food, shelter and education, getting a job and earning an income and, more generally, having the same opportunities as other members of society.

The ICRC will continue providing support to, and working closely with, States Parties and non-States Parties, to ensure that survivors and other persons with disabilities have access to appropriate services. We will also continue supporting the development of national capacities, as this is the main condition to ensuring that services will be made available whenever they are needed by the survivors, regardless of the weapon that injured them, and by other persons with disabilities.

We also commit to work closely with the Co-Chairs of the Standing Committee on Victim Assistance and Socio-Economic Reintegration, the ICBL and the ISU to ensure that weapons survivors in all affected countries will experience measurable and tangible improvements in their lives.