

**14th Meeting of the States Parties
High Level Seminar on Victim Assistance -
November 30th 2015**

Opening remarks

by HRH Princess Astrid

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Vice-Prime Minister, Mister Reynders and myself,
we would like **to thank you all**
for **attending this seminar**
dedicated to victim assistance, a subject that I think is
of utmost importance and to which I am particularly
sensitive.

During the **3rd Review Conference in Maputo** last year, the States Parties of the Ottawa Convention **reiterated their commitment** to the full, equal and effective participation of **mine victims** in society.

They also came to the understanding that **victim assistance should be integrated** into broader national policies, plans and legal frameworks related to the rights of persons with disabilities in the sector of health, social welfare, education, employment, and poverty reduction plans.

The Maputo action plan requires States Parties to **assess the needs of mine victims**, to **set objectives** and to **take actions** to meet these needs.

This approach is facilitated by cooperation and assistance on national, regional and international level.

The full and active **participation** of mine victims and their representative organizations is required **in all matters** that affect them.

Therefore,
the **purpose** of this **seminar** is
to build on the momentum created in Maputo,
and once again
raise awareness about this very relevant **topic**.

This seminar will focus
in particular on
the importance of **embedding assistance**
in a **broader context**
of **human rights** and
the **rights of persons with disabilities**.

I am very pleased to have around this table **landmine survivors and representatives of them, who are established experts** of our Convention:

Mrs Margaret Arach Orech from Uganda,
Mrs Luz Dary Landazury from Colombia,
Mr Mohammad Hussain Ahmadi from Afghanistan,
Mrs Wiboonrat Chanchoo from Thailand, and
Mr. Luis Wamusse from Mozambique.

You became active
campaigners and experts on the matter and
you will be invited to **share your observations**,
each from **your own perspective**,
on the **challenges** you face
and **what needs to be done**
to further empower victims.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Synergy is also important.

How can **assistance**
to victims of anti-personnel landmines
be **embedded**
in the **broader policy framework**
of other conventions, such as the ones
on cluster munitions and of explosive remnants of war?

How **synergies** can be created
between **policies**
providing **assistance to victims of landmines** and
policies providing **assistance**
to people **disabled**
through **other causes** ?

We are privileged to have with us **other experts** who will share their ideas and views from the perspective of the **Committee on Victim Assistance** of the Ottawa Convention, of the Human rights and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

All of us,
we are engaged
in **advocacy** for **universalization**
of the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention.

Anti-personnel **mines**
continue unfortunately
to **kill** or **injure** people, mostly **civilians**,
among them **many children**.

It is nevertheless
very encouraging that,
since the entry into force of the Convention,
the **number of victims** has **diminished**.

Even if there are still many countries
suffering from the legacy of landmines,
mine clearance is also in progress.

Mozambique,

one of the most mined countries in the world,
is **now free** of this **horrible landmines legacy**,
after more than 20 years.

Extensive clearance work
has unlocked agricultural land,
lifted rural communities out of poverty and
enabled the development of major infrastructure.

Tomorrow, **more countries**
will follow the example of Mozambique,
and **will become 'mine free'**
but will they become **'victim free'** as well?

There are
and there will still be many victims, **direct victims** :
adults and children killed,
those who are injured,
survivors with or without
impairments or handicaps
or **indirect victims** :
family members of people killed and
people living in mine affected areas.

How can we **ensure** that mine survivors, people with disabilities, but also indirect **victims**, despite their handicap, become **actors** of their **own development** and **participate** in inclusive health, rehabilitation, education and social economic **reintegration programs**?

Ladies and Gentlemen,

After this debate

with the valuable experience of our experts,

I am sure that **today's seminar will contribute to improve** our actions on victim assistance.

Victim assistance **remains**

at the **heart of the efforts**

of all the States Parties of the Convention, and

will remain, more than ever before,

central in its future.

I wish ourselves a very **fruitful seminar.**