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VA High Level Session

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Let me thank you Your Royal Highness Princess Astrid for your kind invitation and for giving me this opportunity to share my perspectives.

Unfortunately we have got a lot of challenges in Afghanistan. Landmines is very famous, because they have been killing and disabling my fellow Afghans for over three decades. The nearly one million persons with disabilities, with a significant number of landmine victims are among the most vulnerable groups.

Let me give a couple of examples of challenges faced every day:

- 1. Psychological problems:** a significant number of persons with disabilities, in particular mine survivors experience psychological problems, they are traumatized due to countless problems, from discriminations to unemployment they face. I personally experienced this challenge after I lost my both legs on a landmine accident in Kabul. A traumatized person lose his/her self-confidence and get isolated. That is the reality for many of my Afghan fellows unfortunately.

But what is the solution? For overcoming of this challenge, we need to provide psychological and psychosocial counseling which is known as Peer to Peer Support. This is a very simple method, but very effective one. It takes a maximum of a week to train survivors on how to do peer counseling, once they are trained they can effectively help survivors/persons with disabilities to participate in their society, go to school or get out and look for a job. For example, if every hospitals in mine affected areas, hire two survivors for this work, a big part of the problem will be solved and a lot of survivors will get employed.

- 2. Another big challenge we face is about access to public services:** Unfortunately in most part of the country, especially in faraway villages that are also affected by mines and war, survivors and persons with disabilities do not have access to their basic rights,

because the public places like schools, hospitals, universities, shops and banks are not physically accessible. Because they cannot afford to pay for transports. Or in some instances, they face discriminations or discouraging behavior by authorities.

There are solutions like making the public services physically accessible; sensitizing authorities, service providers about rights and needs of survivors; offering mobile services and creating systems to help in transportation of survivors. But the long term solution is to provide services in the nearest possible locations to survivors/persons with disabilities, which I understand that this is not possible for a developing country such as Afghanistan to do any time soon.

- 3. A third challenge is, the negative attitudes against persons with disabilities and survivors:** Most of them experience denial by members of their communities, sometimes by purpose, other times out of lack of awareness. We have been working very hard but there is still a sense of pity rather than recognition of rights, even at the level of family members. Victim Assistance has helped raising awareness within government ministries, but my country still fails to make victim assistance as one of its priorities.

The solutions are clear – at the community level we need to raise more awareness to change mindsets, at decision making level, we have to make the victim assistance as one of the national priorities otherwise it will be so difficult to integrate victim assistance into broader public services.

Thank you again for the opportunity.