

**Speech by Ms. Wiboonrat Chanchoo, Representative of Thai Landmine Survivor  
at the 14<sup>th</sup> Meeting of States Parties to the Mine Ban Convention  
30 November 2015, Geneva**

**Her Royal Highness Princess Astrid of Belgium,  
Honourable Chair,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,**

It is a great honour for me to be here today at the Meeting of States Parties to the Mine Ban Convention as a landmine survivor from Thailand.

I would like to share 3 short stories: 1) my experiences as a victim of landmines; 2) what I have done for other mine victims; and 3) the lessons that I hold crucial for helping others affected by landmines.

I became disabled nearly 20 years ago. That day, I went in to the forest near the Thai-Cambodian border to collect bamboo to bring home. I was not aware that there were landmines hidden in that area. All I well recalled was that all of a sudden there was loud noise and my body was catapulted into the air. When I looked at my left leg, I saw it was shattered with dangling fractured bones. I screamed to warn others not to come near while I crawled myself to safety.

Although the incident took my leg, not my life, living with disability has not been easy for me. In my case, my husband could not deal with it and felt ashamed of my physical condition so he abandoned me and left our family taking with him all the money and assets we had. But he left the most valuable assets for me, our two daughters. I did not give up, I continued working in the paddies and plots, growing rice and vegetables, and raising my two kids on my own.

As time went on, I came to realise that a person with disabilities not only can live a normal life with the proper care and support from those around them; but they can also contribute meaningfully towards others. After having met many handicapped persons living an even harsher life than my own, abandoned and forgotten, I decided to join a local support group for people with disabilities. It is a platform where we can work together to help improve our living conditions.

I believe that the first and foremost challenge for many people with disabilities is their attitude towards themselves. Many are disheartened and despaired, and turn to drinking and drugs or even to suicide. Therefore, as a friend, I attach much importance to giving encouragement and moral support. I want them to champion their disability, to champion their own lives, and live a normal life once again.

The next important support essential to mine victims in my opinion are financial assistance, distribution of life necessities such as wheelchairs, prosthetic legs, and vocational training. As the head of the group, I have to be proactive and engaged with public and private donors, and connect them to our beneficiaries to ensure that appropriate assistance reached those in need.

Other support with no less importance for mine victims are modification of accommodation and public facilities for appropriate use by persons with disabilities, raising awareness and understanding regarding the rights of persons with disabilities among group members and channels by which they can receive help and training from

the government. Furthermore, sources of investment fund were introduced to allow group members to start up their own livelihoods.

My group now comprises over 100 landmine survivors. Most recently, I have expanded the scope of my activities to include persons with various disabilities, orphans, children with HIV infected parents, and the abandoned elderly.

One lesson I learned from my 20 years of working for the disabled is that developing close personal relationships and networks that are informal and local are extremely important elements for victims who need close guidance both physically and psychologically.

Another important lesson is that most victims of landmines live far away from the centre, in which most aid and relevant government officials are located. For that reason, setting up a local network to deliver assistance is a much more efficient and sustainable approach in providing assistance.

Lastly, I would like to thank the Government of Belgium and the Government of Thailand for the warm invitation and support extended to me to come share my experiences and vision at this esteemed conference.

Lastly, I wish to emphasise that government support and understanding for landmine victims is vital to ensuring our full and equal participation in the society. Our hopes and dreams are in the hands of all States Parties represented here. The international community must work together to ensure that no one will have to suffer from this indiscriminate weapon ever again. We must stop the use of landmines and work towards its eradication, together with pushing forward the promotion and protection of the rights of landmine victims in an all-inclusive and sustainable manner.

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