



Government of the Republic of Uganda

NINTH MEETING OF THE STATES PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION ON THE PROHIBITION OF THE USE, STOCKPILING, PRODUCTION AND TRANSFER OF ANTI-PERSONNEL MINES AND ON THEIR DESTRUCTION

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Statement by

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Consideration of the General Status of Implementation – Assisting the Victims

Introduction

The Government of the Republic of Uganda ratified the Anti-Personnel Ban Treaty in 1999. It also ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol on 25th September, 2008. These legal instruments give Government the legal mandate, structure and direction for all important activities in mine action, including Victim Assistance.

On the local scene, the Government of the Republic of Uganda has put in place policies and legislation that aim at protecting the rights and needs of Landmine survivors and other persons with disabilities (PWDs). The National Policy on Disability provides an overall framework for implementation of programmes for persons with disabilities, including landmine survivors by Government line Ministries, Disabled Peoples' Organisations (DPOs), other Civil Society Organisations, the private sector, caregivers, community members and persons with disabilities themselves.

To strengthen the operationalisation of the National Policy on Disability, the Persons with Disabilities Act was enacted. The objects of the act are:

- a) to promote dignity and equal opportunities for persons with disabilities;
- b) to develop and promote the participation of PWDs in all aspects of life as equal citizens of Uganda;
- c) to encourage the people and all sectors of Government and community to recognize, respect and accept difference and disability as part of human diversity;

- d) to eliminate all forms of discrimination of persons with disabilities on ground of their disabilities;
- e) to encourage all sectors of Government and community to promote and include disability issues into all economic, political and social development policies and programmes;
- f) to promote positive attitude and image of persons with disabilities as capable and contributing members of society, sharing the same rights and freedoms as other members of society.

The Government also established the National Council for Disability by an Act of Parliament. One of its major functions is to monitor and evaluate the extent to which, Government, NGOs and the private sector include and meet the needs of PWDs in their planning and service delivery.

To facilitate planning and implementation of programmes for landmine survivors and other persons with disabilities, the Government, in collaboration with key stakeholders, developed the Comprehensive Plan on Victim Assistance (2008-2012). The plan addresses the following thematic areas:

- i) Understanding the extent of the challenge;
- ii) Emergency and continuing medical care;
- iii) Physical rehabilitation;
- iv) Psychological and peer support;
- v) Social and economic reintegration;
- vi) Laws and public policies.

As noted, the above themes are in line with Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Treaty. The plan of action takes a rights-based approach and takes into account the principles of inclusion, empowerment, victim assistance as a development issue and multi-sectoral collaboration. In September, with technical support provided by the Implementation Support Unit through the European Union Joint Action, a monitoring mechanism was developed to track progress in implementing the Comprehensive Plan and achieving the objectives.

In this regard let me take this opportunity to highlight on the achievements made:

i) Data Collection

Data is important for planning and implementation of programmes on victim assistance.

Most of the data on Landmine survivors and other PWDs is scattered in different line Ministries such as Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD), Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Sports, Uganda Bureau of Statistics and Uganda Mine Action Centre. For example, in the north, the NGO AVSI has collected data on 1,387 mine and ERW casualties in two districts of Amuru and Gulu.

Uganda has made efforts to establish a Community Information System (CIS). The CIS has developed a tool for data collection and information in terms of disability including name of person with disability, cause of disability, type of disability, age, marital status, level of education, main economic activities and other skills among others. This CIS could be used to capture specific information on landmine survivors.

The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development organizes quarterly meetings with all actors in victim assistance to exchange information and reduce duplication of efforts. These sessions help the Government to update information on the number of Landmine survivors and those receiving support. The challenges and strategies to overcome them are mapped out. The main actors in victim assistance include AVSI, Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief-Uganda (CPAR), World Vision International, World Food Programme and other humanitarian agencies. These organizations work closely with Local Governments and Associations of Landmine Survivors. There are about 1800 Landmine Survivors who have received support in Northern Uganda.

The Government is about to complete registration of persons that have been disabled as a result of the war. It is hoped that this will provide adequate data for planning and implementation of the programmes for landmine survivors.

ii) Improving access to emergency and continuing medical care services

The Ministry of Health, in collaboration with other partners, supports community-based Village Health Teams. However, there is a need to increase training on simple care and the identification of special needs of landmine survivors and other PWDs.

iii) Improving access to rehabilitation services

The Ministry of Health has a Disability Prevention and Rehabilitation Section. The Ministry has Regional orthopaedic workshops which provide assistive devices. These workshops also provide prosthetics and orthotics. Currently orthopaedic technicians in the North support Landmine and Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) survivors by fitting them with prostheses. However, there still exist a large number of amputees particularly in Western Uganda who have not received support of this kind. The Ministry of Health is now working closely with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to improve on delivery of services especially in the area of quality assurance.

iv) Improving access to psychological support and social reintegration

The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development through Community Development Officers/Rehabilitation Officers is carrying out psychosocial support activities for landmine and ERW survivors and other persons with disabilities. The other agencies involved include CPAR, World Vision and Associations of Landmine Survivors. However, there is need to strengthen these services by conducting joint training and expand the programmes to reach the remotest parts of the districts as some of the landmine survivors and other persons with disabilities have been resettled. Arrangements are underway to train peer groups to engage in psychosocial support activities

v) Increasing access to economic activities

After physical rehabilitation, Landmine and ERW survivors receive financial support from a number of International Organisations.

During the monitoring exercise in August, September and October this year, it was revealed that AVSI is supporting a number of Associations of Landmine Survivors with machines for moulding clay products, like bricks, ventilators, ridges, flower vases and pots. AVSI supported the groups with computers. The Landmine Survivors have a solar panel Project for phone charging to boost their economic activities. There is the Humanist Action for Human Rights (HAMU) which provides revolving loans. At least 35 Landmine survivors and 5 families of Landmine survivors have benefited from this project. These survivors have used the profits to build decent houses for themselves.

CPAR and World Vision International are supporting Landmine survivors by distributing goats, pigs, poultry, beehives and cows to them to generate income.

These NGOs are providing capacity building to Associations of Landmine Survivors to ensure that the income generating activities yield good results.

Some of the Landmine survivors receive vocational training in welding and fabrication, carpentry and joinery and tailoring. Others are receiving ox-ploughs to help them in farming as they return to their villages.

Their participation in income generating activities has helped them to meet their day to day needs including supporting their children in schools.

vi) Resettlement of Landmine Survivors

Reintegration of Landmine Survivors and other PWDs is a priority of Government of Uganda.

Resettlement assistance is being provided to landmine and ERW survivors and other persons with disabilities who accept to return to their villages. The PWDs with support from community members are expected to erect walls and Government provides roofing materials. This support is provided by the Office of the Prime Minister.

The Landmine survivors and other PWDs are being mobilized and sensitized to access the Government Micro-finance Scheme popularly known as *“Prosperity for All”* and other programmes under the Peace and Recovery Development Programme (PRDP).

vii) Policy and legal frameworks

The Uganda Constitution recognizes the rights of PWDs and provides the basis for the enactment of laws and policies that address their concerns. The Constitution provides for fair representation of marginalized groups on all constitutional and other bodies to ensure that the rights of PWDs are promoted.

Other laws include the following:

- a) The Local Government Act CAP 243 provides for representation of PWDs (male and female) in local councils at all levels. It also provides for representation of persons with Disabilities in Parliament (5 MPs). There are 56,000 persons with disabilities participating in the decision making processes at different levels of local councils.
- b) The National Council for Disability Act (2003) provides for investigation in matters or incidents relating to violation of rights of persons with disabilities and take appropriate action in relation thereto or refer the matter to the relevant authority;
- c) The Persons with Disabilities Act (2006) provides for protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities;
- d) The Equal Opportunities Commission provides for equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities.
- e) The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol will provide an even stronger foundation for strengthening actions in the disability sector.

Conclusion

The Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development is working with the Co-Chairs of the Standing Committee on Victim Assistance to further enhance the report on the Status of Victim Assistance in Uganda that was presented in June this year. This report will provide greater clarity on efforts to achieve the aims of the Nairobi Action Plan.

The line Ministries, DPOs, Civil Society Organisations and development partners are cooperating to ensure implementation of programmes to benefit Landmine, ERW survivors and other persons with disabilities. This is being enhanced through the National CBR Steering Committee which brings together all stakeholders, including relevant ministries. The committee meets on a quarterly basis to exchange information and this has helped to minimize duplication of efforts and promote maximization of resource utilization.

However, it is important to note that the Government of Uganda is still facing many challenges in terms of implementing the Comprehensive Plan on Victim Assistance due to other competing priorities. There is inadequate technical support to build the capacities of personnel within relevant Ministries and other service providers. Some of the Civil Society Organisations are closing down due to lack of funding.

I would like to extend my gratitude to UNDP for financial and technical support. Given the shift of the Ugandan Mine Action Programme towards national execution, the MGLSD is in the process of signing a Letter of Agreement with the United Nations Development Programme to implement activities that would further operationalize the Comprehensive Plan of Action on Victim Assistance. A dedicated MRE/VA Advisor has been deployed by the

Danish Demining Group, through UNDP support, to provide more coordination support and build the capacity of relevant ministries and partner organizations.

But I also take this opportunity to urge the donor community to do more to support our efforts to implement the Comprehensive Plan on Victim Assistance so as to meet our obligations to address the rights and needs of Landmine, ERW survivors and other persons with disabilities.

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