

***[Gender and Mine Action Programme (GMA)
Copy of audio statement on gender and diversity
By Mr. Dominic Wolsey]***

Good afternoon, my name is Dominic Wolsey, I work as Programme Manager for the Gender and Mine Action Programme (also known as GMAP), an NGO based in Geneva, Switzerland. Our goal is to highlight the importance of gender and diversity for the mine action sector and promote gender equality and women's empowerment through effective gender mainstreaming in the sector. We work with organisations operating in the mine action sector as well as national authorities to deliver best practice on this topic and it is a pleasure to have the opportunity to address some of these issues today.

I've been invited by the Implementation Support Unit of the APMBC to speak to you briefly on the topic of gender in victim assistance. An understanding of the significance of gender is vitally important for the delivery of assistance to casualties, survivors, and indirect victims. Gender norms create different expectations and social roles for women, girls, boys, and men. This often means that they have very different needs, even when faced with the same type of injury, impairment, or challenges.

Organisations providing victim assistance support should ensure that women, girls, boys and men can benefit equally from victim assistance services. This requires an in-depth understanding of the local gender norms, as these can change from country to country, region to region, and community to community. This should lead to a greater understanding of the obstacles to – and opportunities for – better mobility and access to all services.

If this all sounds rather abstract then consider the fact that worldwide an estimated 80% of the civilian casualties of landmine, ERW, and victim-activated IED accidents are men and boys, whilst the majority of indirect victims are women and girls. Ask yourself - why is this case?

Depending on the context, men and boys tend to engage in riskier activities and are more likely to move through contaminated areas, and are thus in greater danger of being involved in an accident. Society often places them in this situation as they are expected to provide for the family, just as women and girls are expected to look after family members who are injured.

To take a stereotypical example of a family with a father who works, a mother who takes care of the family, and a son and a daughter who both go to school. Say the father is injured in a landmine accident and can no longer work, what happens to the rest of the family? Perhaps the mother is forced to go out to work, although she has little work experience or training. Then who will look after the injured father? One of the children is forced to drop out of school to care for him. This is usually the girl, as society expects women and girls to fulfil caregiving roles. So you can see that one accident can disrupt many lives in different ways. Victim assistance interventions should be responsive to these different needs and providers should seek to understand how the impact of an accident differs depending on one's age, gender, and the type of impairment.

Of course, many women and girls are injured and killed in accidents and many men and boys can become indirectly victimised. I would ask you to consider how this affects a family differently from the situation I have just described. Women are more likely to be abandoned by their partners or families after being injured in an accident and are more likely to face social stigmatisation. Girls are more likely to be withdrawn from school after an accident. Furthermore, accidents involving women and girls tend to be underreported.

In many countries, men have greater mobility than women, and find it easier to access services as they are more likely to have means of transport and their families are less likely to object to them travelling great distances or staying in a strange town overnight.

As providers of victim assistance services, your role is to enable access and to find ways around these sorts of gendered obstacles. But how to go about this? Well, as GMAP we recommend some straightforward, practical steps which you can find in our Operational Guidelines for Victim Assistance Handbook which I believe will be distributed at the event today. If you can't get a copy it's available on our website in English and Arabic.

There isn't time today to cover all of the areas we would like to but a few simple steps are to:

- Ensure that all services are made available to both women and men, including socioeconomic inclusion activities such as vocational training opportunities
- Collect sex, age, and disability disaggregated data and analyse it in order to identify gaps in delivery
- Spread awareness of VA services to both women and men and consider how this message is communicated so that it reaches everyone
- Aim to provide transport to services and to accommodate the needs of women and children who may have to travel large distances to access services. Take into account that, in many communities, women and girls are less able to travel than men and boys.

Now - In December of last year I visited the Directorate for Mine Action in Baghdad to conduct a short assessment of the state of gender mainstreaming. I'm sure Ms Allah Fadil Fahed will speak on the role of the DMA at this event so I will only mention a few findings.

An interesting finding in the report was that whilst women are less likely to access physical rehabilitation services, for some of the reasons described above, men are less likely to access psychosocial support services. This is thought to be because it is viewed as less acceptable for men to share their feelings or require emotional or psychological support than women. There may be a need to offer different support services for men such as peer-support groups which have had success in other countries.

One key recommendation from the report was that collaboration between Victim Assistance structures and other areas of responsibility within the Iraq Government such as protection and education should be strengthened. If the DMA encounters cases of survivors or family members being physically or sexually abused then a referral process to the correct authorities must exist for the protection of those individuals. The same is true for cases where children are unable to attend school as a result of their injuries – I was informed in Iraq that only 40% of girls resume school attendance after receiving prostheses; a referral process should be in place to ensure that education authorities are aware and to guarantee their right to education.

Facilities should be adapted to maximise access – this can be something as simple as separate waiting rooms for men and women. Likewise I was informed that a lack of female physiotherapists is currently restricting women's access to rehabilitation services in Iraq. For many, especially those from conservative backgrounds, it is not acceptable to be treated by a member of the opposite sex. This should not be viewed as an insurmountable barrier by service providers, but rather as a problem with a straightforward solution – recruit both men and women as healthcare practitioners.

Finally the Government of Iraq requires that a minimum of 5% of ministry staff are persons with disabilities. The DMA and other bodies working on VA are uniquely placed to provide work for survivors and other persons with disabilities and this should be seen as an opportunity.

Of course it is easy for me to sit here in Geneva and tell you how things should be done in Iraq without consideration of resources, politics, or any number of local challenges that you may face. It is down to you to develop strategies to overcome the different barriers that women, girls, boys, and men face in accessing VA services. I only ask that you consider these different barriers and respond to them. I'm sorry I'm not available to answer questions in person but we are of course available to answer requests for assistance at GMAP so please contact someone from the ISU for our details if you want to get in touch with us. So with that I thank you very much for your attention today and wish you the best of luck in your efforts.