

Statement on victim assistance

14th Meeting of States Parties to the Mine Ban Treaty

2 December 2015



Thank you Mr. President

Here we are -- a good 16 years after the entry into force of the Mine Ban Treaty. Since then, casualties from mine accidents have decreased significantly, and the treaty can be greatly credited for this. Yet, even now, in 2015, there still are new survivors of incidents with mines and explosive remnants of war who are in need of assistance, whether in mine-affected countries or those that have been cleared. In addition, there are increasing numbers of casualties of other types of explosives - especially such as improvised explosive devices - all of whom are in need of the same services. As such, the bar has been raised for victim assistance efforts.

In view of this situation, an integrated approach is needed to ensure a coherent and responsible response to this situation. On the one hand, dedicated victim assistance funds as part of humanitarian mine action budgets need to continue to be made available. And, on the other, ensure that resource allocation for emergency humanitarian response, development and human rights efforts is also made relevant to the needs of survivors.

Let me briefly explain these two sides of the same coin, starting with VA dedicated funds.

We know that VA has been a catalyst to advance inclusion of persons with disabilities in mine/ERW affected countries. Victim assistance - earmarked-supported initiatives have improved access to services and spurred a disability dynamic in states where disability was not yet a priority.

Furthermore, given the current state of the world, the total number of victims from armed conflict is on the rise. This makes the importance of non-discrimination in victim assistance even more apparent; non-discrimination also means that all efforts supported with victim assistance earmarked funds should benefit people injured as a result of any explosive weapons and people with similar impairments from other causes.

VA earmarked funds should continue to be made available as part of humanitarian mine action budgets, not only for countries who are still working to realize their Article 5 obligations, but also for those who have successfully complied with this part of the treaty. Mozambique is a poignant example. It recently complied with its Article 5 obligations. It now seems that donors no longer consider Mozambique as a country requiring any humanitarian mine action funds, even though it has an active survivor network and has recently adopted a victim assistance national action plan. This is misguided thinking. VA will be the key component of future mine action and it is a pillar that requires ongoing support and must be addressed with the same precision and intensity as clearance and the other aims of the treaty (as is promised in the Maputo Action Plan).

As other states become mine-free, will they face the same fate as Mozambique now seems to be facing, and as Albania and Uganda did earlier on? As the Mine Ban Treaty community, we need to say 'no' to this! Mine-free does not mean victim-free. Continue to support countries, whether cleared or

not, with dedicated victim assistance funds. Raise the % of Humanitarian Mine Action funds supporting victim assistance from its current meager 7%.

Let me now move to the other side of the coin, which is ensuring that the victim assistance obligations are realized through efforts that are supported with funds that are not labeled 'victim assistance'.

As you know, 'victims' are comprised of a diverse group of people. In regards to survivors with impairments, the integrated approach requires that disability-specific and disability – inclusive efforts are designed, implemented and evaluated with their specific situation in mind, and in close consultation with them and other persons with disabilities. Given the recent adoption of the disability – inclusive Sustainable Development Goals, all development efforts in affected countries should now consider how to ensure that survivors are also amongst their beneficiaries.

In terms of indirect victims - family members of people injured and killed, as well as people living in affected communities - an integrated approach would see development efforts in line with the Sustainable Development Goals, including related to poverty reduction, take their needs into consideration.

The implications of the integrated approach are different for states in a position to provide international cooperation and assistance, AND affected states.

For actors engaged in development, this implies realizing the victim assistance obligations through efforts that are not labeled 'VA' and that support broader development, human rights and emergency humanitarian initiatives. To ensure that these initiatives also count victims amongst its beneficiaries, their calls for funding proposal for affected countries need to be amended.

For affected states, effective integration would ensure that strategies of, for example, health, social protection, education, labor, and transportation ministries, include initiatives that are relevant to the reality faced by victims. This is a commitment of the Maputo Action Plan.

In sum, sufficient financial and technical support needs to be made available to realize the victim assistance obligations, one the one hand by continuing to earmark funds for this pillar of mine action, and stronger efforts to ensure relevant initiatives undertaken as part of broader frameworks in affected countries also contribute to realizing the victim assistance obligations.

The plight of victims gave rise to the treaty in the first place; let us not now forget those who are at the heart of our work.

Thank you.