

SO YOU WANT TO ADVOCATE FOR VICTIM ASSISTANCE?

Photo: D. Smith

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International **TO BAN**
CAMPAIGN
LANDMINES

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Texts

Mine Ban Treaty

www.icbl.org/treaty/text

Convention on Cluster Munitions

www.stopclustermunitions.org/the-solution/the-treaty

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=259

Useful information

www.icbl.org/Work/MBT/Victim-Assistance
www.survivorcorps.org/NetCommunity/Document.Doc?id=29
www.handicap-international.fr/bibliographie-handicap/index.htm
www.un.org/disabilities/

Organizations

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Thanks to all Victim Assistance Focal Points, Campaigners and
Victim Assistance specialists for their great contribution to this booklet!

Why this booklet?

The purpose of this booklet is to help the Victim Assistance Focal Points, advocates and campaigners in their day-to-day victim assistance advocacy efforts.

SO YOU WANT TO ADVOCATE FOR VICTIM ASSISTANCE?

The Mine Ban Treaty was the first multilateral disarmament treaty to call upon states to take responsibility in assisting victims of a particular type of weapon. The Convention on Cluster Munitions followed a decade later, with even stronger obligations. The ICBL advocates for these promises to become a reality for hundreds of thousands of mine and cluster munitions survivors, for the families of those killed or injured, and for their communities. The ICBL supports full and effective implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) as an effective tool for promotion of victim assistance and the appropriate rights-based framework.

This booklet presents good practices from ICBL VA Focal Points, campaigners around the world. Their ideas may be easily adapted to other contexts. For more information, contact icbl@icbl.org, or get directly in touch with the ICBL VA focal points and campaigners who kindly agreed to share their stories.

Victim Assistance – Why the ICBL needs your help

Providing assistance to survivors of landmines, cluster munitions and other explosive remnants of war remains a challenge for most affected countries, as does providing assistance to affected families and communities. Resource mobilization is insufficient at the national and international levels; victim assistance is considered complex because it covers many fields of action; it is related to the general development challenges of any country; and many states do not consider it a priority despite their international commitments.

Organizations working with affected communities and researchers from the Landmine Monitor continue to report a limited or lack of:

- Accessible medical, rehabilitation, psychological, social and economic services for all victims;
- Ownership, capacities and coordination of stakeholders at the national level;
- Sufficient resource mobilization at the national and international levels;
- Rights-based disability legislation and policies that are enforced to ensure persons with disabilities enjoy all human rights;
- Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely national action plans in many of the affected countries;
- Systematic inclusion of survivors and mainstreaming of disability in all development and human rights initiatives;
- A disability perspective in all international cooperation projects and programs.

⁽¹⁾ The Victim Assistance Focal Points are the individuals who volunteer as point of contact of ICBL on victim assistance in affected countries. And as of Sept 2009, ICBL identified VA focal points in 28 affected States.

The Challenges Facing Survivors

The findings of a recent study on victim assistance “Voices from the Ground⁽²⁾” reveal disappointing facts about the living situation of survivors in 25 affected countries. Over 1600 landmine and ERW Survivors were being interviewed and the major findings are the following:

- Emergency and continuing medical care: Only two-fifths of all respondents (36%) saw progress since 2005
- Physical rehabilitation: Only 28% of survivors globally believed that physical rehabilitation had improved since 2005; most thought that the situation remained unchanged. And only 24% of survivors thought that the government now provided more support to physical rehabilitation than in 2005.
- Psychological support and social reintegration: Only 21% of respondents thought that psychological support and social reintegration services had improved since 2005. The area where the least survivors, just 19%, saw improvement was in the level of government support.
- Economic reintegration: Economic reintegration is the area where most respondents (24%) thought the situation had worsened and just 19% saw improvement. More worryingly, just 9% of survivors thought that they would not be the last ones to be chosen for a job.
- Laws and public policies: Only about a quarter of respondents (26%) found that the protection of their rights had increased since **2005**.

The Good News: Progress in Survivor Advocacy

As a result of advocacy and campaigning of the ICBL Victim Assistance Focal Points and campaigners in many countries there have been positive developments in victim assistance. In many affected areas, survivors have seen an improvement in services and in the protection of their rights. Some countries have ratified the CRPD and CCM, some have begun implementing the CRPD, and some have begun connecting the dots between victim assistance and the rights of persons with disabilities.

We hope that this booklet will serve as a guide to all those interested in promoting survivor rights and positive change for persons with disabilities around the world. It includes advocacy tips and examples of successful campaigns that use a rights-based approach to victim assistance.

⁽²⁾ http://en.handicapinternational.be/Voices-from-the-Ground_a616.html

Who are mine and cluster munition victims?

States Parties to the Mine Ban Treaty have agreed that mine victims are all “Those who, either individually or collectively, have suffered physical, emotional and psychological injury, economic loss or substantial impairment of their fundamental rights through acts or omissions related to mine utilization”⁽³⁾. This includes all those killed and injured by mines, their families, and affected communities.

The Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM) defines victims as “all persons who have been killed or suffered physical or psychological injury, economic loss, social marginalization or substantial impairment of the realization of their rights caused by the use of cluster munitions. They include those persons directly impacted by cluster munitions as well as their affected families and communities.”

What is victim assistance?

Victim assistance aims to ensure victims of landmines, cluster munitions and other explosive remnants of war enjoy all human rights. Victim assistance includes: emergency and continuing medical care, physical rehabilitation, psychological support and social and economic inclusion; it also includes data collection to understand the challenge faced and identify the location and needs of survivors; and the establishment, implementation and enforcement of relevant laws and public policies.

Who are decision-makers?

In the context of this booklet, decision-makers are the persons whose social or official position enables them to take decisions that impact community members. Examples of elected decision-makers include ministers, parliamentarians, mayors and heads of communities. Examples of non-elected decision-makers include government officials, directors of public institutions such as clinics or schools, religious leaders and village elders.

⁽³⁾Review of the Operation and Status of the Convention 2005-2009

THE STATES' COMMITMENTS

Reminding decision-makers about their commitments: a powerful advocacy tool!

Mine Ban Treaty

"Each State Party in a position to do so shall provide assistance for the care and rehabilitation, and for the social and economic reintegration, of mine victims..."⁽⁴⁾

Cartagena Action Plan

The Cartagena Action Plan (CAP) calls on States Parties to provide adequate assistance to mine victims, through a holistic and integrated approach that includes emergency and continuing medical care, physical rehabilitation, psychological support, and social and economic inclusion.

The CAP's actions #23 to #33, includes the following actions for States Parties to take in the period of 2010 to 2014, particularly by those states responsible for significant numbers of mine victims:

- collect data on mine victims, as well as assessment of their needs and priorities
- develop, review, modify, implement and monitor national laws and public policies to protect the rights of mine victims
- develop a comprehensive plan of action to address the needs and promote the rights of mine victims
- establish a inter-ministerial and inter-agency coordination mechanism which should be composed of ministries, Persons with Disabilities' Organizations (DPOs), NGOs and other organizations involved in VA, with a focal point to ensure the coordination is carried out
- ensure the inclusion and full and active participation of mine victims and their representative organizations and relevant experts in the development, implementation and monitoring VA programs
- build the capacity of organizations and national institutions charged with delivering VA services
- increase the availability of and accessibility to all VA services by removing physical, social, cultural, economic and political barriers
- raise awareness among mine victims about their rights and available services, as well as within government authorities, service providers, and the general public to foster respect for persons with disabilities
- monitor and report on progress and challenges regarding VA programs

The CAP has strong and action oriented action points. Make sure that the civil society organizations involved in VA and the rights of persons with disabilities in your country know about this document, particularly about the actions #23 to #33 of CAP. This is a powerful advocacy document for all the VA and disability rights advocates and campaigners for the next five years. So make use of it whenever you can

⁽⁴⁾ Mine Ban Treaty's Article 6.3

Convention on Cluster Munitions

Article 5 of the CCM states that each State Party shall “adequately provide age- and gender-sensitive assistance, including medical care, rehabilitation and psychological support, as well as provide for [cluster munition victims’ social and economic inclusion. Each State Party shall make every effort to collect reliable relevant data with respect to cluster munition victims.”

The Convention on Cluster Munitions also:

- links victim assistance to human rights and international humanitarian law;
- recognizes victims as affected individuals, families, and communities;
- obliges states to implement specific measures and report on them;
- calls for no discrimination to be made between victims of cluster munitions, victims of other weapons or war, and other persons with disabilities;
- calls for ensuring close consultation and the active involvement of victims.

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The purpose of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) is to “promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity.”

The convention entered into force in May 2008. It is the most detailed and comprehensive international instrument for the respect and enforcement of the human rights of persons with disabilities. It is a key tool for advocacy as it gives states clear indications of what they need to do to ensure persons with disabilities enjoy their human rights and dignity.

If your country is party to that convention, invoke it to support your victim assistance advocacy activities: States Parties have committed to fully implementing the convention, they must keep their word. If a country takes steps to comply with this convention, while ensuring persons with disabilities in areas affected by mines/explosive remnants of war fully participate in and benefit from the process, the country is effectively contributing to implementing its victim assistance obligations.

If your country is not party to the CRPD and its optional protocol, you can question their position, invoke the convention as a standard by which all states should abide, and pressure them to sign and ratify the convention. In addition, all of the states of the world have endorsed the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR). You can indicate that the CRPD is actually an explanation of what measures need to be in place to comply with the UDHR with specific regard to persons with disabilities.

SUCCESSFUL ADVOCACY – WHAT TO KEEP IN MIND

Guidelines to help you plan and carry out advocacy work

Gather and understand relevant information on victim assistance

Ensure that you have adequately identified **the needs of survivors and their priorities**. Discuss with and include survivors and other persons with disabilities throughout the advocacy process; meet with civil society organizations working in the area you want to work on. Understand **the laws and policies** that apply nationally. Sources of information include: organizations of survivors and persons with disabilities in your country; the Landmine Monitor; statements made by your country and by the ICBL at the meetings of the Mine Ban Treaty; national reports on access to health, social and employment services as well as national census and other statistical data. Use this data and evidence to reinforce your advocacy efforts.

Establish coalitions and alliances

Collective advocacy can be very powerful. Identify organizations that may become your partners in advocating for the rights of victims of conflict and other persons with disabilities. Excellent allies include civil society organizations (human rights groups, organizations of persons with disabilities, women's groups, and organizations working on health, microfinance, education, or children's rights). Identify and create good relations with influential members of Parliament as they can help you to reach out to the right decision makers. Find contacts and allies within the media to publicize your events and write special articles on the situation of survivors.

Define the focus and goals of your advocacy

While it is important to advocate for a comprehensive approach to victim assistance, you may also decide to focus your advocacy on a specific element of victim assistance (like medical care) or one guiding principle (like ensuring that women have equal access to services). **Your goals should be SMART, meaning specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound.**

For example: "By March 2010, the X government will have developed a physical accessibility law/code of conduct".

Identify decision-makers who can really make a difference

Your targets are all those who are in a position **to act or mediate in favor of your goal**: specific persons (politicians, religious and community leaders, doctors...) and organizations (government agencies, donors, administrative institutions, companies...) You may want to get your message across to community councils, parliamentarians, diplomats, human rights councils, local and international NGOs, Ministries of Social Affairs, Health, Employment, Education, Women, etc.

Act at the appropriate level

International level: to advocate for the development of treaties and action plans, and to monitor their implementation.

National level: to develop, change or enforce laws, policies and/or programs.

Local or community level: to change prejudices and attitudes among the general population; to influence community councils; to challenge or reinforce traditional practices.

Family level: to work with the families of survivors in ensuring adequate support is given to survivors; to change attitudes and practices that may be limiting the participation of survivors in community life.

Have a clear message and a good messenger

Your message needs to be clear, complete, and culturally appropriate. Communicate in a simple way and adapt the message to each target. Propose realistic solutions that have real chances of being adopted. Communicate the messages through people who speak from personal experience and those who can attract the attention of your targets.

Define the steps to get your message across

Use the media, talk to government representatives, organize public meetings, publish documents... be innovative and be sure to publicize successful cases of victim assistance.

Identify your resources

This includes financial resources, material, human resources, etc. Identify those you already have and define a strategy for those you need to acquire through fundraising activities, grants and cooperation with partners.

Use existing opportunities to promote your message

For example, if there is a national conference on health, social services, education, employment, human rights or gender, you can have a presentation, stand or side event linking that topic to disability issues. These forums are opportunities to discuss victim assistance with a variety of stakeholders that may support your cause. Make the most of anniversaries, special days such as the international day for mine action (4 April), for the rights of persons with disabilities (3 December), for peace (21 September) etc, VIP visits and other opportunities that may lead to attention being given to your activities.

Review your activities and evaluate your impact on a regular basis

Regular review of your work will allow you to change and adapt your strategy according to the impact you are having, and to external developments that may facilitate/pose a challenge to your work. Evaluating your activities and measuring to what extent you achieved your goals will allow you to draw lessons for the future.

SUCCESSFUL ADVOCACY – TIPS AND TRICKS FROM CAMPAIGNERS AROUND THE WORLD

1. Present your case as a success opportunity for decision-makers

Although it is important to raise awareness on victim assistance among as many people as possible, you need to target key decision-makers who have the power to make a difference at the local, national or international level. Once you have identified your decision-makers, inspire them - present a solution that, when followed, will also be a success for the decision-makers themselves. Make it a win-win game for you and your decision-makers!

El Salvador – Win-Win Situation: People with Disabilities and Politicians Benefit from CRPD Ratification

In 2007, a coalition of organizations of persons with disabilities and other civil society organizations, including LSN El Salvador, participated in a meeting of the International Relations Committee of the National Assembly of El Salvador. The goal was to discuss whether El Salvador should ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Members of three political parties were present and various members of civil society expressed their strong support for a quick ratification of the convention.

LSN El Salvador presented concrete examples on how the convention would directly benefit 600,000 persons with disabilities in the country. They distributed the newly translated Spanish-language version of the convention to the Committee members.

As a result of the meeting, the three political parties forming the Committee decided to submit the convention for ratification in the National Assembly. The Committee's chair successfully argued to move the discussion on ratification up as first item in the agenda.

On 4 October 2007, 77 representatives out of 84 voted in favor of the ratification of the convention! Members from all political parties argued in favor of the rights of persons with disabilities and exhorted the government to enforce existing national laws.

Now that El Salvador is Party to the convention, the hard work is just starting to ensure this international tool is transformed into national law that will directly benefit all citizens.

For more information:

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2. Target local service providers and institutions in affected communities

Some persons with disabilities have needs that require a specific response. In a great majority of cases, survivors and other persons with disabilities could participate and benefit from existing local health, social and economic services. However, providers are often unaware of the rights of persons with disabilities and the actual steps they could take to include persons with disabilities in their work. Obstacles that can lead to the marginalization of people with disabilities include:

- locations are not physically accessible for persons with disabilities;
- distance between the services and the beneficiaries is too long or rough;
- persons with disabilities lack information on the location of accessible services;
- services are not affordable for persons with disabilities who have limited resources;
- information is not made accessible to visually impaired and hearing impaired persons;
- discrimination and prejudice prevent persons with disabilities from accessing services

Working to raise awareness among institutions and service providers themselves at the local level can make a big difference, since they are in a good position to eliminate existing obstacles, change their practices accordingly, and have an impact on the lives of persons with disabilities rapidly and sustainably.

Angola –Local Vocational Training Programs are Made Accessible to Persons with Disabilities

The living standards of persons with disabilities are often precarious in the mine-affected region of Huambo: they face difficulties in accessing the few training opportunities that exist, which leads to limited economic inclusion.

In response to this situation, local organizations of persons with disabilities ANDA and ASADEF, alongside Handicap International, started a project to raise awareness on the rights of persons with disabilities among local vocational training centers. This included sharing good practices and instructive steps to ensure persons with disabilities participate in their programs. To ensure sustainability and a wider impact, civil society implemented this project in partnership with the ministries of social affairs and employment and the national institute for employment and vocational training.

Employees and persons in charge of the vocational training centers learned about the rights of persons with disabilities and their ability to work. The NGOs provided specific examples of how to eliminate obstacles, such as by ensuring physical accessibility arrangements for persons with limited mobility and outreach trainers for those living in remote areas. It was also important to ensure the staff understood that, when given the same opportunities as everyone else, persons with disabilities have the same chances of success. Civil society organizations also distributed information to persons with disabilities throughout Huambo about the newly accessible training centers.

This awareness-raising campaign was a success! Between July and December 2006, 192 persons with disabilities received vocational training through the project, 43% of whom were mine survivors.

For more information:

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3. Develop a long-term relationship with decision-makers and establish yourself as a credible information provider.

4. Provide informational materials at the local level, in the local language

Successful campaigners establish themselves as a resource for decision-makers by supplying them with information such as newsletters, research papers, and other relevant publications, and by helping them find additional material or data if necessary. Translating materials or summarizing them in the local language is key to successful advocacy.

Cambodia— Campaigning in Local Language Leads to CRPD Ratification

As part of their successful advocacy activities on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Cambodia Campaign to Ban Landmines:

1. Translated materials and the convention itself into Khmer, the Cambodian national language, so that more people could have access to it, advocate in its favor and understand their rights and the obligations it would place on the government.
2. Printed a newsletter about the convention in Khmer and distributed it widely in various provinces.
3. Discussed the convention and raised awareness among various stakeholders, including on a local level.
4. Sent letters to high level authorities, urging them to sign and ratify the CPRD.

Now, Cambodia is one of the countries that has signed and ratified the CRPD. But it still has not signed the Convention on Cluster Munitions!

For more information:

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5. Advocate for innovative low-cost solutions, close to survivors

Set realistic goals that take into account the limited resources of most mine-affected countries. Propose practical solutions that have real chances of being adopted by decision-makers to change the lives of survivors rapidly and in a sustainable manner. For example: it may be better to advocate for some persons to be trained in basic rehabilitation at the local level rather than to advocate for a fully equipped rehabilitation center to be created in a far away, scarcely-populated region. This approach is known as community-based rehabilitation.

Zambia - Realistic Solutions Improve Healthcare for Women with Disabilities

Disability often results in vulnerability in many African countries, including Zambia. Many persons disabled for different reasons, including landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW), are excluded from public services. Most of them cannot access reproductive healthcare services, and many women with disabilities give birth in unhygienic settings, without the aid of qualified health workers. They do not benefit from immunization programs for themselves or for their newborns.

This translates into high death rates of mothers and babies.

Despite limited resources, an innovative program was designed and implemented by the Ministry of Health in association with traditional birth attendants to provide maternal and child health services for women with disabilities. Village elderly and traditional birth attendants were trained in basic hygiene rules and were equipped with re-usable delivery kits, some medication and a bicycle for transportation. Many deaths have since been prevented and general care to all mothers with disabilities has been improved.

Building new hospitals, training doctors and nurses, and buying ambulances was simply not feasible in Zambia at the time. Instead, the Zambia Campaign to Ban Landmines pushed for the mainstreaming of disability issues into the national development agenda and the development of local programs. Local healthcare, a relatively inexpensive and culturally appropriate solution, has saved lives and made a real difference in the lives of persons with disabilities.

For more information:

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6. Promote a comprehensive approach to victim assistance

Victim assistance is related to medical care and rehabilitation, but also to social and economic inclusion, education and psychological support. These different issues are dealt by different ministries and organizations. Advocate for victim assistance with all those stakeholders, so that they become aware of the rights of survivors and other persons with disabilities and contribute to ensuring those rights are respected.

Uganda – Victim Assistance Advocate Promotes a Multisectoral Approach

The plight of landmine survivors went unheard for a long time in Uganda. Margaret Arach Orech from the Uganda Landmines Survivors Association (ULSA) says: “My first active encounter at advocating for victim assistance was during the National Council for Disability meeting held in Kampala in 2004. Appointed as a representative of the ULSA by the Minister of State for Disability, I sat on the council composed of 24 members to represent victims of conflict.

Most members of the Council are persons affected by disability directly or indirectly. The Council’s role is to provide advice and to monitor the situation of persons with disabilities. It communicates the needs and concerns of persons with disabilities to the government and its agencies, and ensures they are turned into action.

When I first talked about the needs of landmine survivors, most members could not comprehend. All they knew was that mine victims lost their limbs. What followed seemed to escape their minds. I used this opportunity to highlight the components of victim assistance: emergency and continuing medical care, physical rehabilitation, psycho- social support and economic reintegration.”

In its advocacy activities, the USLA liaises with the Mine Action Centre and its victim assistance advisor. The targets for advocacy messages are the media, civil society organizations and people with disabilities’ organizations, as well as ministries related to victims including the Ministries of Health, Gender, Labour and Social Development, and Education.

Says Margaret: “What I have learnt from these advocacy experiences is that victim assistance is a cross-cutting issue and needs a multisectoral approach. Also survivors are important to work with when sending advocacy messages. They have to be part of it and take active roles.”

For more information:

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7. Work with the media to publicize your messages

To reach a large number of stakeholders at the national level, it is important that your message is picked up and shared by the local media. The public, the government and NGOs may be interested in working with you once they have heard about your goals on victim assistance and the work you are doing. Use innovative media tools to make your message attractive!

Turkey - How the Initiative for a Mine-Free Turkey Got the Media on Board

“Part of our work involves raising awareness that mines and explosive remnants of war continue killing and disabling civilians and children; that they affect the socioeconomic life of civilians; and that there is a need for victim assistance over the long term” says Muteber Ogreten from the Initiative for a Mine-Free Turkey.

To attract the attention of TV journalists, the Initiative presented them with a CD of filmed interviews and testimonials. In the CD, survivors and their families told their stories and needs, lawyers spoke about the legal problems of victims, the Agricultural Engineering Association explained the economic impact of humanitarian demining, local authorities gave an overview of the situation and human rights organizations spoke as well. All gave ideas and suggestions on how to solve the problem.

Volunteer cameramen and a volunteer TV journalist helped put the CD together. Their professional intervention played an important role in making the CD an excellent tool. The Initiative for a Mine-Free Turkey told the media: “It was impossible to take you to the victims or to bring the victims here. So we prepared a CD that reflects their situation and messages. Here are the victims; you are face to face with them.” It was the first time that the media were approached this way, and they were very impressed.

After the CD came out, many TV channels prepared a special feature about the issue - one of them even won a prize for its program! As Muteber explains, the Initiative is now seen as a major, reliable source of information on the landmine issue.

“Now we know each other because we have done many interviews and we have increased public awareness about landmines. Now, they call me before I call them, they ask questions and get my advice regularly.”

For more information:

Muteber Ogreten

Initiative for a Mine-Free Turkey

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8. Be part of authority-holding or decision-making institutions

Knowing your rights and having brilliant ideas on how to solve a problem is often not enough to bring about the change you want. Indifference and apathy on the part of decision-makers often make progress difficult. One way to overcome such obstacles is to align yourself with respected institutions or groups, making it more likely that your voice will be heard. Alone you may not be considered a significant actor, but if you represent a more well-known cause and constituency, then policy-makers will be inclined to listen.

Uganda – Advocacy for School Accessibility

Margaret Arach Orech, from the Uganda Landmines Survivors Association, visited a secondary school in Western Uganda to offer peer support to a young landmine survivor who lost both of her legs. While there, she spoke with the headmaster of the school to enquire how the students with disabilities fare especially in terms of accessibility.

Orech knew that the student with disabilities always left her wheelchair at the entrance of a door and crawled on all fours to enter the buildings, including the public washroom! She asked the headmaster if he had planned to do anything to improve accessibility for students with disabilities – at least to reserve a pit latrine for their exclusive use. And if the school had any plans to build ramps for the students with disabilities.

The headmaster responded by saying that the Parents Teachers Association could not authorize release of funds to construct a separate toilet facility for only one disabled person.

Margaret then identified herself as a member of the National Council for Disability and spelled out the mandate of the council. This was also at the time when the UN Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was being negotiated. She referred to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and just fell short of threatening to sue! Four months later, when she visited the school, there was a reserved toilet facility and bathroom for the students with disabilities, although the ramps are yet to be built.

Margaret is already planning to further advocate for accessible premises in other schools and uses her influential position to affect change.

More information:

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Uganda Landmine Survivors Association

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9. Empower persons with disabilities to advocate for their own rights

“Nothing about us without us” has been the slogan of survivors and persons with disabilities for a long time now. No one knows best about the needs and priorities of survivors than survivors themselves, and no one can speak about this in a more compelling manner. Ensure that persons with disabilities are consulted about and fully included in your campaigning activities. Build their capacity to do so.

Tajikistan - Survivors Develop their Leadership Skills and Self-Confidence through Workshops and Role Plays

One way to build the capacity of landmine/explosive remnants of war survivors and persons with disabilities is to create opportunities for them to discuss their needs and how to address them based on their own experiences. The Tajikistan Campaign to Ban Landmines organized a summer camp for landmine/explosive remnants of war survivors in August 2008 in Dushanbe, with 25 survivors representing the different regions of Tajikistan.

The aim of the summer camp was to increase the self-confidence of survivors and develop their leadership skills through workshops, discussions, role-plays and artistic activities. Participants were trained on peer-to-peer psychological support, group facilitation as well as advocacy and messaging. The camp also covered other topics like how to facilitate a mine risk education session and some basic first aid notions.

Beyond the trainings and workshops, the summer camp created a good opportunity for the survivors to exchange ideas and experiences and to build a network for long-term exchanges on victim assistance that will lead survivors to advocate for their own rights.

For more information:

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Tajikistan Campaign to Ban Landmines

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10. Create allies to connect you with the top decision makers

Seek out the top government leaders, whether ministers or heads of state, who are best equipped to help make big changes. Explain your goals to them and demonstrate that they are realistic and important. Building and maintaining relationships with such people can lend a powerful authority to your cause.

Afghanistan: Advocacy Committee Elicits Positive Response from President Hamid Karzai

A few years ago, persons with disabilities and their 13 representative organizations established an Advocacy Committee to protect the rights of persons with disabilities. The committee is supported by a credible organization, the Afghan Civil Society Forum. The Advocacy Committee is also supported by two members of parliament who represent persons with disabilities in the upper house: the two MPs have been very supportive in giving access for the committee members to meet at the high level in the parliament and ministries.

Since 2007, Advocacy Committee members have met President Hamid Karzai several times, to discuss the disability issue. In each meeting the president responded positively to the messages to some extent. For example, he agreed to introduce a law to protect the rights of people with disabilities, though the law is still pending approval in the parliament.

In August 2009, in the latest meeting, President Karzai announced the allocation of 1.5% of the total national income to increase job opportunities for persons with disabilities and to establish special schools for people with hearing impairment. Although 1.5% (over 35 million USD) is not enough, this is significant because it is the first time ever that Afghanistan has taken concrete action to address the needs of people with disabilities, including landmine survivors.

The Advocacy Committee members believe that without meeting with the president they would not have achieved such success. The unity, commitment and diversity of the committee members were also likely key elements in their success.

For more information:

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11. Demonstrate the connections between international agreements and treaties

Describe the connections between international treaties, explain the implications of these ties, and show how these linkages can be used to the advantage of the nation. A workshop conducted in Vietnam increased the understanding of different stakeholders about victim assistance in the international treaties. The workshop also encouraged relationships between government and society groups.

Vietnam: Victim Assistance Workshop Highlights Common Ground between Three Key Treaties

In July 2009, Landmine Survivors Network Vietnam (LSN-Vietnam) organized the first national workshop on victim assistance in Vietnam, bringing together almost 150 participants, including government officials, embassy representatives, international and national NGOs, and survivors. LSN-VN co-hosted the event alongside the Committee for Foreign Non-governmental Organization Affairs and the Quang Binh Provincial People's Committee.

The presentations emphasized the synergies among key treaties (primarily the Mine Ban Treaty, the Convention on Cluster Munitions, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities), highlighted the connection between victim assistance and the rights of persons with disabilities, and stressed the need for Vietnam to become party to these international agreements. Attendees discussed challenges faced by landmine survivors and persons with disabilities in Vietnam, and brainstormed concrete steps that could be taken to address the gaps in implementation of victim assistance in the country. Additionally, participants outlined initial ideas for a strategy to initiate international cooperation to support the country's efforts.

While Vietnam has not yet made further commitments to sign these treaties, this meeting (the first of its kind in the nation!) was an enormous step toward promoting awareness of and advancing victim assistance in Vietnam, engaging the government in demonstrating ownership over the issue, and conducting an open discussion between government and civil society. The workshop encouraged relationships between the groups present that will hopefully lead to future collaboration and cooperation.

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12. Collaborate with other civil society actors to develop a coordinated advocacy campaign

Joining with multiple actors to articulate a common goal streamlines campaigns and allows for the maximization of available resources and expertise.

Coordinated action is often the best way to effect broad and substantial changes. This also allows groups to pursue independent projects, while still ensuring that these fall within the framework of the greater purpose.

Uganda – Team Work Between Diverse Groups Leads to Cohesive Advocacy Campaign

Survivor Corps, in partnership with the Gulu Disabled Persons' Union, convened civil society representatives to develop an advocacy campaign in the Gulu and Amuru districts.

Twenty-five representatives from disability advocate groups, service providers, and government officials resolved that the campaign should focus on increasing access for survivors and persons with disabilities to key structures, services and decision-making mechanisms. The plan takes two parallel and complementary tracks, creating concrete changes in specific select structures, while also influencing the governing mechanisms to ensure long-term sustainability.

In order to begin the first track, Survivor Corps convened a team of volunteer advocates to conduct accessibility audits of the buildings that are targeted in the campaign. Once the audits are complete, the groups will continue to advocate with district and local representatives to ensure that accessibility remains a top priority.

By also working closely with local Parish Development Committees, the campaigners hope to influence government budget allocation. Survivor Corps recently assembled representatives from over 80 Parish Development Committees in one-day conferences to solicit their support and commitment to including budgetary requests for making structures and services accessible. The conference resulted in a declaration of commitment and a plan of action to achieve such budgetary requests in 2009.

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Cycling Against Landmines, Geneva - Dead Sea-2007

Cycling to advocate for the victims' rights? Sounds strange! But for me, it has worked very well.

It all started in 2004. I had stopped my career as a paralympic cyclist, and was looking for new challenges. I found the ultimate one: The Tour d'Afrique, a cycling race from Cairo to Cape Town, some 12'000 km in 99 stages all the way through Africa. As a double amputee with the privilege of living in Switzerland, with the privilege of having funds and prosthetics that allow me to do cycling, and even such kind of cycling, I felt I had to express solidarity with the amputees and disabled living in poverty and misery, and especially those whose lives were dramatically and unexpectedly changed from one day to another: the victims of landmines. I dedicated my Tour d'Afrique to the fight against landmines, and raised funds for Geneva Call and the Swiss Foundation for Mine Action. They, in coordination with the Swiss Campaign to Ban Landmines (Swiss CBL), actively supported my Tour d'Afrique.

It was a huge success: African, Swiss and international media covered it, and the encouraging meetings I had with survivors, campaigners, and other disabled would fill a book. All those encounters were much too short, but it was an amazing way to share hopes, challenges and experiences. And I believe that where I passed, I had a small, but concrete impact on the attitude towards persons with disabilities, and maybe traces have lasted until today. In a small Kenyan town, for example, I was sitting in a coffee shop, after a day of cycling in the desert. I was chatting with a beggar, himself disabled, but he didn't recognize that I'm disabled, too. Light-hearted, he says: everybody speaks about those cyclists coming through our town. And full of joy, he adds: Imagine – there is an amputee among them!

The sympathy and support I found during and after this venture encouraged to continue. Together with Geneva Call and Swiss CBL, we defined a new endeavour: a «winter tour» from Geneva to Zagreb. 1000 kilometers in seven days, in the rain, fog and even snow of the Central European November. At half way, I met with Franca Faita, a former worker of the landmine factory Valsella in Castenedolo, Italy. She, with four colleagues, had started to protest against their own factory. This protest became a huge campaign, and two years later, in 1997, the five women had won: Valsella had to close, after the production of 30 millions mines. The women had won, and they lost their jobs. The final reception for my arrival in Zagreb included artistic performances by young survivors. This resulted in personal friendship, and long after the cycling challenge I was able to contribute to summer and winter workshops for young Bosnian and Croatian survivors, by leading cycling courses and connecting them with experienced Swiss skiing teachers.

One year later, a 7-day-«Tour de Suisse» followed. The last challenge had still to come. In 2007, I cycled from Geneva to the Dead Sea, 4805 Kilometers in 48 days, on the occasion of 10th anniversary of the Mine Ban Treaty. As I was planning the route I was aware that I would cycle through lots of mine-affected countries. However, I was astounded. From my bike I saw marked minefields, the first already in Croatia, the last just 20 km from my goal, on the slopes that lead to the Dead Sea.

During this tour, I struggled with fever and flu over the Swiss mountain passes in the Alps, fought against hurricane force winds in Slovenia, froze in snowfalls in Bulgaria, coughed my way through 70 kilometers of State motorway in Istanbul and fell down in a deluge of torrential rain in Beirut. And I enjoyed the mild winter sun of Syria and Jordan putting the earlier adversity behind me. I even crossed the bridge over the Bosphorus on the saddle – thanks to two supportive Turkish policemen. This connection between Europe and Asia had been closed for many years to cyclists.

All the way, the meetings and encounters were intense as never before. I can't count the interviews I gave, nor the number of cyclists that accompanied me for an hour or a whole day. Cyclists with or without disability, an Asia Champion, even a World Champion. Sometimes, the sympathy I met was overwhelming. As I cycled in Bosnia, for example, in this war-torn country affected by landmines like no other in Europe, they greeted me with such gratitude that I felt almost ashamed. 'We are glad you are here' the Bosnian activists told me. Because for the media, the topic of landmines became a poor one, little was written even about accidents. That's why it's important that people are always reminded of the danger. 'Now we have the chance that once again it will be thoroughly reported.'

It was coincidence that in Bosnia, I rested overnight in, of all places, the village of Gracanica. I had only chosen it as a destination because of the correct daily cycling distance. Local Red Cross workers and journalists had heard about my imminent arrival and were waiting for me. The village was at the front line of the Bosnian war (1992-1995) they said. 'Weapons and ammunition were rare and expensive, that's why everyone laid landmines.' They reported the latest accidents. In the vicinity of Gracanica there are 500 marked fields of landmines. 'Is nothing happening, is there no progress?' I asked. 'Yes, yes,' answered someone dryly. 'This year two fields were cleared.'

The book about all the local initiatives along my routes, about the dedicated activists, about the enthusiast survivors, about despair, hope and struggle still needs to be written. I am glad that I had the chance to meet them all, learn about their reality, aspirations and ambitions. I tried in my way to support them, and throughout all the challenging tours, expressed in different ways and words, my message remained the same, and it came through: **Survivors and persons with disabilities can live a decent life if they get the assistance and support they need and deserve. They can live a life like you and me.**

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR VICTIM ASSISTANCE

Compiled by the ICBL working group on victim assistance

Human rights perspective: Victim assistance is a human rights issue based on the right of all people to an equal opportunity to participate in society through political, economic, social and cultural activities. Limited access to these opportunities created by attitudes and legal, social and physical barriers is a violation of these rights, which are protected by international human rights norms. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities complements the Mine Ban Treaty by further articulating the rights of people with disabilities.

Inclusion: Victim assistance programs and projects should take measures to facilitate the full inclusion of victims in the social, cultural, and political life of their communities. They should be designed to prevent isolation or segregation based on disability.

Participation: Victims should participate in all decision-making processes that affect them; including the planning, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of projects and programs. Victims' views should be heard and considered at all levels of decision-making and at program and project design that refer to their rights. This includes victim assistance, mine risk education and mine clearance programs.

Non-discrimination: Victim assistance programs and projects should not discriminate on the basis of any characteristic, including disability and the origin of the injury or the person's civilian or military status. Likewise, poverty reduction and economic development programs and projects (including microfinance schemes, unemployment services, and pensions) should not discriminate against survivors or other people with disabilities.

Gender and age considerations: Development of services for victims should take into account the gender and age of the victims, and particular efforts should be made to ensure access to and availability of services to all. The provision of services should be proportionate to the gender and age balance in the victim population. Victim assistance programs should also consider the needs of the survivor's spouse and children to ensure long-term support for the family's socio-economic development.

Two-track approach: While victims' rights and requirements should be ensured through programs for the general public as much as possible, special services should be provided where needed to ensure access to these services. Victim assistance should be integrated into disability program and project design; likewise, disability program and project design should be integrated into larger poverty reduction strategies and development programs and projects.

Accessibility: Victim assistance services should be made accessible to all victims. In addition to access on a non-discriminatory basis, full accessibility includes:

- Physical accessibility, including proximity to mined regions, provision of transport to facilities, and possibility for the facilities to be used by persons with disabilities.
- Economic accessibility, ensuring services are affordable for victims, which may mean that victims have the ability to take leave from work and/or receive child care to be able to access services.
- Access to information, guaranteeing that victims know what services are available and how to access them.
- Accessibility also means providing services in a manner that is appropriate to the local cultural context.

Variety, comprehensiveness and integrated nature of services:

Victim assistance should be provided through an integrated approach that includes all of the six components of victim assistance, which are interrelated and all essential to the success of each component. Referral systems and networks should be in place and reinforced to guarantee that victims obtaining one type of service can access all the other components of assistance they require.

Capacity building, sustainability and ownership: Victim assistance needs to be conceived as a long-term activity since it will need to be undertaken through the lifetime of all current and future victims. Victim assistance programs should therefore emphasize from the beginning the training, recruitment and retention of local workers to be responsible for all aspects of project planning, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Over time, States should aim to replace international services with national or local ones. States must also ensure the sustainability of these programs by diversifying funding sources and mainstreaming the activities into general development programs and projects.

Coordination of actors and stakeholders: Planning and providing victim assistance should be coordinated among all stakeholders including the government, international agencies, civil society and the private sector, and at all levels (local, national, regional and international). It is important that all sectors of the government are involved, including the large departments that have a significant impact on disability (health, education, labor) and all other sectors that may be concerned, such as planning, finance and other development authorities.

Individual and tailored approach: Victim assistance should be tailored to the requirements of each specific person and the affected community, and appropriate for the country's specific situation. While victims' rights and requirements should be ensured through programs for the general public as much as possible, special services should be provided where needed to ensure access to these services. Victim assistance should be integrated into disability program and project design; likewise, disability program and project design should be integrated into larger poverty reduction strategies and development programs and projects.

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