Governments must promote rights of landmine and cluster bomb survivors

Press Release -- For Immediate Release

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Campaigns celebrate International Day of Persons with Disabilities

Geneva, 2 December 2010 - Despite significant advances, hundreds of thousands of landmine and cluster munition survivors worldwide still struggle to see their rights respected, said two global civil society campaigns as they marked the International Day of Persons with Disabilities on 3 December. The Cluster Munition Coalition (CMC) and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) are marking the day with a dance in Geneva parallel to an annual meeting of the 1997 treaty banning landmines.

"Landmine and cluster munition survivors can and should be active contributors to their societies, not passive aid recipients," said Firoz Ali Alizada, Treaty Implementation Officer at the ICBL and a landmine survivor himself. "Victim assistance is a matter of human rights, and governments should work with survivors to increase awareness and promote these rights."

In the context of the Mine Ban Treaty and the Convention on Cluster Munitions, victims include anyone who, individually or collectively, has suffered physical, emotional and psychological injury, sustained economic loss or had their fundamental rights substantially impaired due to the use of landmines or cluster munitions. This includes all those injured or killed by the weapons, as well as their families and affected communities.

The past year has seen three major advances in the international legal framework that obliges states to provide crucial assistance to persons with disabilities, namely:

1. On 3 December 2009, the Second Review Conference of the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty, which has 156 states parties, issued the Cartagena Action Plan, which aims to ensure that rights-based victim assistance initiatives improve over the next five years;
2. In 2009, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which entered into force on 3 May 2008, began to be implemented, including in several states with significant numbers of landmine survivors and explosive remnants of war; and
3. On 12 November 2010, the first meeting of the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions, which entered into force as binding international law on 1 August 2010, issued the Vientiane Action Plan to translate the Convention’s strong rights-based victim assistance obligations into concrete actions.

"In recent years, progress has been made on policies and plans to improve victim assistance, but survivors of landmines and explosive remnants of war say their daily lives haven't changed much," said Nerina Cevra, Coordinator of Survivor Rights & Victim Assistance at Action on Armed Violence, a UK-based member of both the CMC and the ICBL. "Governments need to do more to close this gap and make a real difference in the lives of survivors."

The CMC and ICBL recommend five priority areas for governments to concentrate their victim assistance efforts, including improvements in:
• **Socio-economic inclusion:** (i.e. being a productive member of the community and fully participating in community life). Survivors themselves identify this as the top priority.

• **Accessibility:** Too often, services are not accessible to those who most need them, either because they are offered only in city centres, because they are too expensive for survivors to afford, or because there are physical barriers to access for people with disabilities, including landmine and cluster munition survivors.

• **Inclusion:** Governments must ensure survivors are actively involved in the planning, delivery and evaluation of victim assistance programmes.

• **Resource mobilisation:** Victim assistance programmes need adequate financial, technical and human resources that are both long-term and sustainable. Governments should address the needs of all survivors by allocating national resources and asking for international cooperation and assistance where necessary.

• **Reporting:** States must make every effort to collect information on casualties and assess the needs of survivors in order to provide adequate assistance.