

Statement on victim assistance, 30 November 2009

Delivered by Firoz Ali Alizada

We, the representatives of civil society, survivors and persons with disabilities from around the world, are here to examine the past five years' progress and challenges on victim assistance to share with the States Parties both our concerns and our proposals on how best to promote the needs and rights of survivors. Last Friday, over sixty victim assistance experts, including survivors, ICBL focal points on victim assistance, researchers, youth and national campaigners from over thirty countries came together in Cartagena and discussed how to better promote victim assistance in the next five years. We would like to share with you some of our observations.

In May 2009 the Victim Assistance Co-chairs said, "The challenges faced in 2009 are to a large extent identical to those faced in 2004 and likely will be the same as those to be faced in 2014." However we truly believe that together we can make significant strides forward and a difference can be made in the lives of survivors. To this end we share with you the following three messages.

Our first message is to make the implementation of the Cartagena Action Plan a national priority in each State Party and in particular in affected states. As we all know, progress since the First Review Conference has been made in the process used to formulate SMART plans on victim assistance and the rights of persons with disabilities. The level of understanding about Victim Assistance concepts has increased. States Parties have said that they understand that addressing the rights and needs of landmine victims is a long-term commitment which requires adequate financial, technical and human resources. States Parties have said that they recognize the importance of empowerment, inclusion and the meaningful participation of both landmine survivors and persons with disabilities in victim assistance development and poverty reduction programs.

This demonstrates that some progress has been made in the past five years. We, the survivors and persons with disabilities, appreciate these improvements, but our questions are: What is the impact of these achievements on the lives of individuals? Which of the "real needs" of survivors are being addressed? For example, can survivors living on top of a hill in Kabul access schools and clinics? Did unemployed survivors in Yemen get jobs? What happened to those children who dropped out of school in Turkey? Do the landmine survivors in Eritrea know about their rights?

Madam President, a recent study carried out by Handicap International and members of the ICBL all over the world found that 85% of the 1,645 survivors surveyed thought that they were among the last to get a job. Psychosocial support continues to be lacking in many affected states. Of those surveyed, just 25% to 28% said that they received more services in 2009 than in 2005. In 2001, it was noted that most resources were dedicated to medical and physical rehabilitation. This remains the case in 2009. Due to a lack of services, accessibility and job opportunities, limited educational opportunities, and most importantly, inadequate financial and technical resources, the social and economic inclusion of survivors and persons with disabilities has sorely failed in the past decade.

We need to have decent jobs to survive and to support our family members; we need to have access to markets to sell our products; we need to have access to schools, hospitals, places of worship and parks; we and our children need to get proper education; we need to get training for jobs that are marketable. In sum: we want to enjoy our rights in the same way as other members of our society do. We want states to act immediately after this conference to respond to these needs efficiently.

Towards that end, this landmark event gives hope and high expectations to survivors and persons with disabilities all over the world. We value the plans that you announced this morning and we want those plans to be translated into action immediately after this conference.

Ladies and gentlemen, we strongly support the actions on victim assistance in the Cartagena Action Plan. This action plan addresses most of the important aspects of victim assistance. It reiterates the principles of rights and equality, calls on states to prohibit discrimination and other barriers to inclusion, and promotes equal access to services and economic opportunities. It highlights priorities in service provision like availability and accessibility of affordable services, education and awareness. And throughout the text, it emphasizes the participation of

landmine survivors in the development, implementation and monitoring of programs that affect us on a daily basis.

These powerful actions on paper, however, will never bring any changes to the lives of the individuals on the ground unless they are fully and properly implemented in a reasonable time frame. They will not be effective unless donor states and United Nations agencies provide adequate funding for their implementation. They will not be successful unless affected states make them national priorities, from now until 2014. They will not be sustainable unless affected states commit politically, technically and financially. The gaps will remain the same unless states and civil society work together. These are the most important factors that will lead the Cartagena Action Plan to be a success in the next five years.

We are looking forward to hearing good news and concrete plans from high level representatives of the States Parties this week, both donors and affected states, especially during the high level segment on Thursday.

Our second message relates to the absolute necessity to place victim assistance on equal footing as the other pillars of the treaty when it comes to funding. Over the past decade, victim assistance remained the smallest component of mine action funding. While most donor and affected states are unable to identify the level of resources dedicated to victim assistance because it is usually integrated into mine action or development budgets, it is generally recognized by donor and affected states, as well as the ICBL, that the resources available are insufficient. This is disappointing from a survivor's standpoint, to say the least. It is impossible to improve victim assistance programs without financial assistance.

We ask donor states and organizations to pledge adequate funding to victim assistance, to earmark victim assistance funds so they make it to those in need. We want affected states to share concrete and measurable plans on how to improve victim assistance in next five years. Our third message relates to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) as a golden opportunity to advance victim assistance. The CRPD is the most effective framework through which to provide victim assistance.

Landmine survivors face the same stigma, as well as physical and societal barriers that prevent all persons with disabilities from accessing equal opportunities in society. The remedy lies in removing these legal and societal barriers. The CRPD provides detailed rights based guidance on how to create that fundamental change. Therefore we urge those countries that haven't signed the CRPD to sign and ratify without further delay. And those that already are party must align their laws and policies with the CRPD and implement them the ground.

The rights and needs of girls, boys, women and men must be equally addressed; therefore it is important to consider a gender perspective into all mine action programmes to ensure that the needs and priorities of all mine victims are equally and adequately responded. We, as civil society, stand ready to support and collaborate with national efforts to improve the lives of survivors.

In conclusion, once again we urge the States Parties, in particular the affected states, to implement the Cartagena Action Plan over the next five years, to fund victim assistance, and to ratify and implement the CRPD and the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we want to see changes in the lives of individual survivors and their family members in the next five years and we believe that with enough dedication and resources, this is "mission possible."

Thanks.