

**Standing Committee on Victim Assistance  
and Socio-Economic Reintegration**

**Statement by Austria**

**27 April 2007**

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to take this opportunity to brief partners about a recent initiative that Austria carried out in the field of assistance to victims of Anti-Personnel Mines.

On **12 February** 2007, Austria held a **symposium** marking the **10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary** of the Vienna Meeting on the **Convention** for the Prohibition of Anti-Personnel Mines that took place exactly ten years before in February 1997. The objective of this event in Vienna was to commemorate the 10 years of existence of one of the big success stories in international disarmament, ie. the Mine-Ban Treaty. The topic of the symposium “**Assisting Landmine Survivors – A Decade of Efforts**” had been chosen for two reasons: First, because the Mine-Ban Treaty is the first multilateral arms control agreement to address the humanitarian needs of victims, and second in recognition of Austria’s current chairmanship of the Standing Committee on Victim Assistance and Socio-Economic Reintegration.

Under the moderation of Ambassador Wolfgang Petritsch **120 participants representing governments** from all over the world and relevant NGOs followed an intensive debate structured in four panels and dealing with all key aspects of victim assistance. The symposium concentrated on **progress** achieved over the past ten years and **challenges** that still need to be tackled. The Austrian Ministry for European and International Affairs could rely on the great assistance of the Implementation Support Unit in preparing the event. A special note of thanks goes to Kerry Brinkert, Sheree Bailey and Sophie Delfolie.

The importance my country attached to the symposium was highlighted by the participation of Hans Winkler, **State Secretary** for Foreign Affairs, who opened the symposium. **Two mine survivors**, who are well known in this room, Margaret Arach

Orech, Ambassador of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, and Ken Rutherford, Co-Founder of Landmine Survivors Network met with Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik the day before the event.

The symposium concluded that over the past ten years the number of new mine victims has dropped significantly from an estimated 26,000 per year. But still, an estimated 15 to 20,000 new victims per year is still too many. Thus, **victim assistance remains high on the agenda** in the implementation of the Mine Ban Convention.

Progress has been made in the past ten years: we have a greater understanding of what victim assistance actually means; we have a greater understanding of the context of victim assistance in the broader issues of disability, healthcare, rehabilitation, social services and development; lessons have been learnt and continue to be learnt on what it means to provide adequate and appropriate assistance; the importance of the inclusion of survivors in decision making processes is clear; and most importantly it is better understood that victim assistance should be addressed as a human rights issue and not a charity issue.

Today, it is clear that one of the biggest challenge is the **economic** and **social reintegration** of survivors. In particular state parties with fewer resources will need to create improved conditions for the reintegration of their survivors and will need to be assisted in their endeavours by states in a position to do so. One of the key lessons learnt is that support to the economic and social reintegration of survivors and other persons with disabilities is not just about financial aid it is an investment in the future.

Thank you