



Government of Uganda

Statement by;

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Thematic Discussion on Victim Assistance

Progress made in Victim Assistance Objectives
Uganda 2005–2009

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Madam President, Distinguished Dignitaries, States Party Delegations, Partners, Ladies and Gentlemen:

The Government of Uganda is taking victim assistance seriously and is building infrastructure to respond. As Minister of State responsible for persons with disability in Uganda I am pleased to state that Uganda on the 30th of March 2007 signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability and the Optional Protocol. My Ministry has the mandate to advocate for the protection and promotion of fundamental rights of the poor and vulnerable groups including landmine survivors.

Further progress has been made on victim assistance with Uganda moving well beyond the identified objectives within a Victim Assistance Action Plan. Uganda has developed an integrated approach which utilizes existing frameworks and involves multiple ministries and disability agencies with support and capacity being built by UNDP and participation from four INGO.

There continues to be efforts made to raise awareness which has resulted in landmine survivors and victim assistance taking center stage. A government funding line has been opened for landmine survivors at the Office of the Prime Minister. Areas in northern Uganda are moving from emergency to early recovery creating an urgency for affirmative action for landmine survivors and other people with disability in accessing the right to return. The Ministry would like to highlight their concern and need of support from other States Parties.

Objectives within the Victim Assistance Action Plan that have new information include:

Establishing a database on landmine victims utilizing socioeconomic indicators has initiated since the last meeting. The Government of Uganda would like to thank the Government of Ireland for their attention in getting this required pilot in place. An indicator development workshop was completed in February identifying the first tier of indicators which were piloted during March 2007 in two affected landmine areas of the country with different issues. The indicators have already assisted in teasing out issues previously not looked at. One example is that many landmine survivors both men and women have faced marital break up after the accident. Of concern is the high level of abandonment of women landmine survivors shortly after their mine accidents. The National Surveillance Network is based on IMSMA 4.0. The identification of landmine victims and the monitoring of their reintegration process is required and is a priority of the Government.

Referral to Rehabilitation:

Accessibility to and choice of services is an issue for landmine survivors. The reality is that distance and knowledge of services can prevent access. The Ministry of Health will pilot a referral structure to assist landmine survivors to access ongoing medical and rehabilitation services according to their individual needs. The Government of Uganda thanks the Government of Ireland for this grass root action.

Social - Economic Reintegration:

Social development and the reintegration process is vital to Uganda, especially in areas where IDPs are returning and resettling. An area of expressed concern by the involved Ministries is noted segregation, abandonment and inability of some to return, forcing the elderly and persons with disability to remain behind in the camps. Providing landmine victims with the

right to return is considered of high importance in socio-economic reintegration. The next step is to find partners who will assist in the timely development of affirmative action to provide equal opportunity for landmine survivors to access their right to return home with their families and their communities. Plans are in place to protect land rights. Persons with disabilities have a slogan “nothing for us without us” so active participation and choice of landmine victims is essential to the success of this process.

Gains have been made in economic sustainability. Two actions highlighted are the establishment of cooperative in the manufacturing of banana rope with the Kasese Landmine Survivor Group in western Uganda that is a private/ public partnership with a high end furniture manufacturer. Landmine survivors are currently producing rope that is being purchased at the import rate. The Government thanks UNDP for this effort. Additionally, a pottery workshop has been initiated in northern Uganda in partnership with the Gulu Landmine Survivor Group. The landmine survivors are trained and producing nice pottery. The Government thanks AVSI and the EU for this effort.

Landmine Survivor Groups

Uganda has taken the investment made by “Raising of the Voices Programme” to the next level. Landmine survivors groups have been reorganized and strengthened to manage their own affairs in two districts. The Government of Uganda would like to thank the Government of Austria for their support and looks forward to further developments and new groups during 2007.

Capacity Building:

Focus continues on building capacity and advocacy issues. The National Council for Disability has identified landmine survivors as a priority group in 2007. At the Mine Action Awareness Day earlier this month, 35 landmine survivors, many whom are internally displaced, stood together for the first time and made formal statements to the press and Minister of State for Disaster Preparedness, Relief and Refugees. This would not have been possible nor respected the year before.

The vision for mine action in Uganda states;

“A Uganda free from landmines and explosive remnants of war, where individuals have safe access to their environment, and where mine and ERW survivors are fully integrated into their communities.”

Mine Action Policy

This vision can not be realized without coordinated efforts and involvement by all relevant stakeholders.

The Ministry of Health at the Indicator Workshop included multiple key Ministries and stakeholders to ensure that all the relevant perspectives of victim assistance were addressed. The structure of the workshop was fully participatory.

The Community Based Rehabilitation National Steering Committee coordinates all key ministries and stakeholders working in this technical area. In the future victim assistance will link with this National Committee with some of our partners already aligning attending meetings.

The Office of the Prime Minister has integrated mine action into the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan which is a three year programme and a priority of the Government that

involves multiple ministries. Mine Action is also part of the Joint Monitoring Unit which interfaces Mine Action with development issues.

A National Mine Action Steering Committee includes six key ministries and is the body responsible for policy, direction, resource allocation and approval of action plans.

The Uganda Mine Action Center has recruited a Victim Assistance Coordinator who is a landmine survivor and actively involved in ICBL. It is regretted that she could not be here today. Victim Assistance at the National Mine Action Center will coordinate with line ministries and direct victim assistance activities with the accredited INGOs.

There are three accredited mine action INGOs working in the area of victim assistance. These INGOs are AVSI, Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief and World Vision. The Government of Uganda thanks them for their work and their commitment in building a harmonious working relationship while transitioning from emergency to early recovery. Additional mention is made to the Norwegian Association of the Disabled as a long term and appreciated partner who has assisted in the establishment of the community based rehabilitation model that will be adapted to serve as a foundation strategy in the return of landmine survivors in northern Uganda.

Lastly gains have been made within the legislative frameworks as the *National Mine Action Policy* continues towards the Cabinet. There is representation of persons with disabilities from the local councils up to Parliament. The *National Policy on Disability* is in force together with other legislation including the *Persons with Disability Act 2006* on anti-discrimination. As Uganda now begins the task for the ratification of the *Convention of Persons with Disability* rest assured that the *Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction* and the ensuing responsibilities to landmine survivors will not be forgotten, only strengthened.

Thank you.

For God and My Country