



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE HOLY SEE

Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction

INTERSESSIONAL WORK PROGRAMME 2003-2004
Standing Committee on Victim Assistance and Socio-Economic Reintegration
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Allow me, Co-Chair, to briefly address the issues of assistance to the victims of anti-personnel mines and, in particular, of their indispensable re-integration in a normal socio-economic life. In Asia and Africa I have personally seen the ravages caused by anti-personnel mines on the bodies of fleeing refugees and of working women and men in border villages. Such mines are a source of inhuman suffering.

The Holy See gives capital importance to the Ottawa Convention, to its implementation as a means of prevention and to its requirement to assist the victims of these dreadful weapons. In fact, the central point of the Convention is preventing that persons may become innocent victims of this vile, murderous and useless arm. And when there has been the lack of knowledge, of ability or of will to take political decisions or practical measures to prevent production and dissemination of anti-personnel mines, national authorities and the international community have no right to avoid their respective responsibility for a comprehensive treatment of the tragic consequences mines cause.

We must not make the victims of mines victims also of oblivion and discrimination or victims of a condescending type of assistance. Mines victims are citizens and full members of their community. They have the right to be effectively associated in the elaboration and implementation of both rehabilitation and socio-economic re-integration policies. A practical understanding of solidarity implies that special attention should be granted to those men and women who need it so that in turn they may play an active role in promoting a pacified and fraternal humanity.

Victims of anti-personnel mines are innocent witnesses of a wrong approach to security. A large number of countries have realized that anti-personnel mines, besides their inhuman and devastating effects in the long run, are a useless arm. They give the illusion of an artificial security. In most cases the citizens of the country that employs this arm are those who suffer most its disastrous consequences. The universalization of the Convention is the recognition that the suffering and the broken lives of the victims are by far a price too high for a semblance of security. For this reason, on the agenda of the forthcoming First Review Conference of the Convention in Nairobi the plight and a program of assistance to victims of anti-personnel mines should take a prominent place in the reflection.

It must be acknowledged that substantial progress has been achieved in this area. Millions of mines have been destroyed. States, volunteers and faith-communities have provided invaluable assistance to maimed and traumatized victims. Much remains yet to be done, Co-Chair. The greatest risk is the temptation of discouragement before the enormity of the task. Neither the destruction of the stocks nor demining challenges should make us forget the victims who will need a sustained national commitment and an always renewed international solidarity for some long years.

Healing entire populations of the consequences of war and armed conflicts, especially the people that have been most affected and victimized, is the best investment in building up true security and a durable peace.