

Dear colleagues and friends,

We thank the mine affected states for their presentations for thoroughness in preparing and reporting on the state of the problems and in this way also taking active steps in solving their own problems. We also wish to thank the donor countries and institutions for their reports and for their continuing support of the goals of the Convention and for mine action in all its phases from demining, mine risk education, stockpile destruction, and most of all for rehabilitation of landmine survivors and their full reintegration into society.

Croatia is pleased to note that victim assistance is an issue that has been gaining importance at our meetings over the past two to three years. It was noted earlier this week that almost every delegation in its general statement has talked about victim assistance and rehabilitation. This is good – verbal acknowledgment is necessary.

Yet, we also heard earlier today that assistance to mine victims, in fact, is not improving. Mine victims and NGOs know this, as do those of us who work closely with them. At the same time a general concern, a consensus, seems to have emerged here that more needs to be done, much more, for rehabilitation and social and economic reintegration of landmine survivors.

In the case of Croatia, because of the war in the 1990s, there is now a social consensus that the needs of war victims and of mine victims need to be acknowledged. Yet, all of us here also know that isolating one minority group and treating it as a special case is problematic and frequently undermines the original purpose, that of, rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

In Croatia, we are approaching the problem of rehabilitation and reintegration by seeing it as a *catalyst* for much needed changes into society regarding more general populations with other physical or mental disabilities ... and more generally still, as an opportunity to work for equal rights and opportunities for all.

Along with prosthetic, orthopedic services and psychosocial rehabilitation, we know and we have had it reiterated that rehabilitation comes with jobs. Economic independence and self sufficiency are the basis of successful reintegration and rehabilitation. We have been reminded by our “Raising the Voices” speakers and others that a job is a right, a human right, as well as an investment into the most productive sector – that of human beings.