

Raising the Voices

As you know from our previous meetings, we have agreed as the Standing Committee on Victim Assistance, Socio-Economic Reintegration and Mine Awareness to deepen and strengthen the participation of landmine survivors in the work of the Standing Committees, particularly this one. Our goal is to ensure that landmine survivors are effectively involved in the expression of their needs and means developed to meet these needs here in Geneva, and later in Meetings of States Parties. Our goal is also to facilitate a process whereby landmine survivors become more involved in the events and issues that concern them in their own home countries.

I want to take just a few minutes to explore a few points of justification for this project, to talk about WHY we want to do this.

First, to ensure participation of the people concerned in ANY issue makes good common sense. They know what they need. They know what the situation on the ground is. They know what the priorities are. They are the “experts” of Victim Assistance in a way no one else will ever be.

Second, it is “right” meaning ethical, just and proper to do so. The people who will be the most directly impacted by decisions that are made about them should have a say in those decisions, right? Imagine having Intersessional meetings without representatives of any mine-affected countries? In matters concerning States, we don’t do that anymore. We consult, we confer, we get input, we make sure that stakeholders are included in whatever concerns them.

Thirdly, we do this for OUR benefit. We expect that the decisions we make and the actions we take will more likely be on target if the process includes the major stakeholders.

Finally, we have invited these eight people here this week, and will continue to do so (I hope for the next few years at least) to counteract the typical reaction to persons with disability, which is often exclusion.

The principle of Inclusion is not new. The UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disability makes reference to Inclusion and Participation in no less than ten of the 22 Rules. They advise States that persons with disabilities and their organizations should be directly involved in conceptualizing, planning, formulating, organizing, researching, developing, monitoring, and evaluating programmes, services, and agencies that have any relationship to or potential impact of persons with disability.

In the global disability movement, the phrase “nothing about us without us” is used to encapsulate this idea, that for decades, forever really, decisions have been made about persons with disability as if they were all children, all powerless, all for some reason, not to be taken into consideration in the thinking, planning, deciding about them... And that that should no longer happen.

Today, we move forward from the old exclusionary habit, and make strides toward real inclusion. We could have waited for this to happen “naturally” or by accident. But we have decided to be proactive, and to expedite the process.

And expedite we did—from December’s Standing Committee meeting to now there has been a flurry of activity to allow this to happen. None of it would have been possible without the support of the Canadian government’s support. So, I would like to extend a very important Thank You to the representatives from Canada here today who encouraged the Working Group on Victim Assistance to forge ahead and who with their moral and material support made this project possible. I would also like to thank all the two co-chairs, Nicaragua and Japan, and our two co-rapporteurs, Honduras and Canada, for their participation throughout the process, for their invaluable suggestions as to process and content, for offering to serve as an informal steering group to the project implementors.

So, how will Inclusion happen? How will the Voices of Landmine Survivors be Raised within the process of implementing the Mine Ban Treaty? Well, the first step is for me to stop talking, and to pass the microphone to Porfirio Gomez Samora from Nicaragua who will give us an overview of what the Survivor Advocates have been doing for the past two days, and what is planned for the rest of the week.

Porfirio Gomez Zamora, I give you the floor.

When Mr. Zamora finishes, I will take the microphone again to talk a bit about we envisage the future of this work.

I have the privilege of introducing to you eight people who are joining us this week from Central and South America. They are:

1. Edgar Moreno - Colombia
2. Alonso Cardozo - Colombia
3. Jesus Martinez - El Salvador
4. Jose Miguel Larenas Mahn - Chile
5. Uriel Antonio Carazo - Nicaragua
6. Danis Cristobal Gutierrez Hernandez - Nicaragua
7. Porfirio Gomez Zamora - Nicaragua
8. Nelson Romeo Castillo Landazuri - Ecuador