14th Meeting of the States Parties
High Level Seminar on Victim Assistance -
November 30th 2015

Opening remarks

by HRH Princess Astrid
Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Vice-Prime Minister, Mister Reynders and myself, we would like to thank you all for attending this seminar dedicated to victim assistance, a subject that I think is of utmost importance and to which I am particularly sensitive.
During the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Review Conference in Maputo last year, the States Parties of the Ottawa Convention reiterated their commitment to the full, equal and effective participation of mine victims in society.
They also came to the understanding that **victim assistance** should be integrated into broader national policies, plans and legal frameworks related to the rights of persons with disabilities in the sector of health, social welfare, education, employment, and poverty reduction plans.
The Maputo action plan requires States Parties to assess the needs of mine victims, to set objectives and to take actions to meet these needs.

This approach is facilitated by cooperation and assistance on national, regional and international level.
The full and active participation of mine victims and their representative organizations is required in all matters that affect them.

Therefore, the purpose of this seminar is to build on the momentum created in Maputo, and once again raise awareness about this very relevant topic.
This seminar will focus in particular on the importance of embedding assistance in a broader context of human rights and the rights of persons with disabilities.
I am very pleased to have around this table landmine survivors and representatives of them, who are established experts of our Convention: Mrs Margaret Arach Orech from Uganda, Mrs Luz Dary Landazury from Colombia, Mr Mohammad Hussain Ahmadi from Afghanistan, Mrs Wiboonrat Chanchoo from Thailand, and Mr. Luis Wamusse from Mozambique.
You became active campaigners and experts on the matter and you will be invited to *share your observations*, each from *your own perspective*, on the *challenges* you face and *what needs to be done* to further empower victims.
Ladies and Gentlemen,

**Synergy** is also important.

How can assistance to victims of anti-personnel landmines be **embedded** in the **broader policy framework** of other conventions, such as the ones on cluster munitions and of explosive remnants of war?
How synergies can be created between policies providing assistance to victims of landmines and policies providing assistance to people disabled through other causes?
We are privileged to have with us other experts who will share their ideas and views from the perspective of the Committee on Victim Assistance of the Ottawa Convention, of the Human rights and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
All of us,
we are engaged
in advocacy for universalization
of the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention.
Anti-personnel mines
continue unfortunately
to kill or injure people, mostly civilians,
among them many children.
It is nevertheless very encouraging that, since the entry into force of the Convention, the number of victims has diminished.

Even if there are still many countries suffering from the legacy of landmines, mine clearance is also in progress.

Mozambique,
one of the most mined countries in the world, is **now free** of this **horrible landmines legacy**, after more than 20 years. Extensive clearance work has unlocked agricultural land, lifted rural communities out of poverty and enabled the development of major infrastructure.

Tomorrow, **more countries** will follow the example of Mozambique, and **will become 'mine free'** but will they become ‘**victim free**’ as well?
There are
and there will still be many victims, direct victims:
adults and children killed,
those who are injured,
survivors with or without
impairments or handicaps
or indirect victims:
family members of people killed and
people living in mine affected areas.
How can we ensure that mine survivors, people with disabilities, but also indirect victims, despite their handicap, become actors of their own development and participate in inclusive health, rehabilitation, education and social economic reintegration programs?
Ladies and Gentlemen,

After this debate
with the valuable experience of our experts,
I am sure that today’s seminar will contribute
to improve our actions on victim assistance.
Victim assistance remains
at the heart of the efforts
of all the States Parties of the Convention, and
will remain, more than ever before,
central in its future.

I wish ourselves a very fruitful seminar.