16th Meeting of the States Parties to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention.

Panel: Keeping People at the Heart of the Convention:

Effective Victim Assistance

Tuesday, 19 December 2017

Opening remarks by H.R.H. Princess Astrid of Belgium
Mr Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,
Let me start by expressing my gratitude to Austria for its hospitality and for hosting the 16th Meeting of the States Parties to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention here in Vienna. This event confirms once more the continued Austrian commitment to our common objectives of a world free of mines by 2025.
2017 marks/the 20th anniversary/
of the signature/of the Ottawa Convention/

On this festive occasion/ I am very pleased/
to be with you today/.
I recognize/ so many familiar faces. /
We are all members/
of the « Ottawa Convention family »/
as you rightly mentioned,/ Mr Chairman,/ in your kind invitation./
Ladies and Gentlemen, / 
At this anniversary, /I would like to convey/ 
- a special message/of respect and encouragement / 
to the survivors, /to the victims,/ to their families/ and/ to the victims’ representatives/ 
for their essential role/and continued efforts./ 
- Let me congratulate also/ all the NGO’s,/ 
the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, / 
the ICRC,/ and/ the civil society/ 
for their persistent commitment/ 
during these 20 years of a campaign/ 
which led to a Nobel Peace Prize!/
- A special word of gratitude/ to Prince Mired of Jordan/ for His generous devotion/ and contributions/ to the Convention./
- Our courageous deminers equally/
  deserve a special place/ in the collective memory/
  of our Ottawa Family,/ with deepest respect/
  for their patience/ and perilous devotion./
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Together, we are proud to celebrate the achievements of the Ottawa Convention, and specially today,
with the announcement made by Sri Lanka, to join us, as number 163.

This is indeed a wonderful birthday present!
Many countries have destroyed their stocks of antipersonnel mines. States have finalized their clearance obligations, returning cities and villages to their inhabitants, guaranteeing access to drinking water, lands, schools and hospitals.

Nevertheless, there is no time for complacency, we shouldn’t rest on our laurels. We must keep promoting formal adherence to the Convention in order to strive for its universalization.
Even today, these mines, especially the scourge of improvised anti-personnel mines, continue to kill or injure people, mostly civilians, among them many children.

A lot has been achieved, but much needs to be done. The clearance of landmine contamination and the destruction of stockpiles are still persistent challenges in many States Parties.

Cooperation and assistance between both donor and affected States remain vital, to be 'stronger together'.
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Victim assistance is part of the Convention, with an obligation to address the needs of survivors, their families and communities, affected by landmines.

As your Special Envoy to the Ottawa Convention, I am honored to open this panel entitled: “Keeping People at the Heart of the Convention: Effective Victim Assistance”.

Victim assistance is indeed a priority of the Convention.
The Austrian Presidency has rightly decided to organize this interactive panel to raise awareness on this relevant topic.

- Indeed, at the 3rd Review Conference in Maputo, State Parties reiterated their commitment to the full, equal and effective participation of mine victims to society.

- The Maputo Action Plan recommends that victim assistance should be integrated into broader national policies related to the rights of persons with disabilities.
in the sector of health,/ social welfare,/ education,/ employment,/ development/ and/poverty reduction./
- And State Parties/are also invited/
**to embed victim assistance/**
in a broader human rights/ and disability context,/to address the needs/
and guarantee/the rights of mine victims/
in an age- and gender-sensitive manner./
- Actually/ States /are engaged **to empower/** those who are injured/ by landmines,/ so that/
they **become actors/ of their own development./**
Ladies and Gentlemen,
I really hope that this panel will contribute effectively to keeping victim assistance at the heart of the Convention. 
We all know, that our Ottawa Convention Family, really has a heart. 
That’s why I feel so blessed to be your Special Envoy:
This is diplomacy with a heart.
The Ottawa Convention/is one/
of the very few grand diplomatic achievements/>
of our times,/
with universal appeal,/with concrete measurable results/
within the lifespan of one generation./It’s just/ like Jody Williams said,/and I quote her/
“Together/ we have given the world/
the possibility/ of one day living/
on a truly mine-free planet."/
Our reward is the smile of safe families,
living on mine-free lands.

Our strength and determination are inspired
by the courageous testimonies
of surviving land mine victims,
as they are speaking to the world
as talented representatives
of many thousands anonymous victims.
The Ottawa Family should and will remain
an inspiration for a better future.

In this spirit, I open this panel and I wish you/
a very fruitful exchange of views.