



16th Meeting of the States Parties to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention
Vienna, 18 – 21 December 2017

**STATEMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA
ON VICTIM ASSISTANCE**

Thank you Chairperson.

As this is the first time that the Delegation of the Republic of Croatia is taking the floor, I would like to congratulate you and your able team for the extensive and excellent work that you have undertaken in preparing the 16th Meeting of the States Parties to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (16MSP APMBC) in beautiful Vienna. I can assure you of my delegation's full support in your endeavor as the President of this Meeting and I am confident that under your competent stewardship this Meeting will be safely steered to a sound and successful outcome. For us, it is always good and welcomed to see the representative of a fellow European Union (EU) Member State presiding over such an important conference.

I also wish to thank all members of the Committees for their hard and effective work so far and finally, I take this opportunity to commend the work of the Implementation Support Unit (ISU), its Director and staff on their job and services, and in particular, for serving as the good spirit of our Convention.

We are proud and honored to serve in the Committee on Victim Assistance and would like to thank Committee's Chairperson for conclusions and recommendations. We particularly see the value in further reinforcing cooperation with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and other relevant human rights and disability actors and instruments.

Croatia aligns itself with the statement of the European Union.

Since we already had the opportunity to elaborate in detail on our efforts regarding the victim assistance at this year's Intersessional Meetings, I would like to share with you a brief update on two new developments in this regard.

The Trust Fund “Croatia without Mines” with local authorities has planned and organized the construction of children’s playground in the municipality of Donji Lapac (the Lika-Senj County, the most mine-contaminated county in Croatia). This is of two-fold importance: first, this municipality is in the first group of the areas of the special state concern and is economically below the state average of the development; second, the entire area was heavily affected by fighting during the Homeland War in 1990s, meaning that there is still around 18 km² of mine suspected area (MSA) in the surrounding areas. In the municipality, there are over 200 pre-school children and more than 90 pupils attending elementary school. Until now, the municipality did not have any adequate sports and recreational facilities for children and young people, such as a playground. Placing a playground in such deprived environment contributes to the creation of social content for children and young people by playing in open and safe environment, which allows learning through game and encourages development of social skills. Through the construction of children's playgrounds as safe spaces for socializing, and in conjunction with other complementary programs, mine/UXO-affected local communities are psychosocially and economically empowered.

The non-governmental organization „Association Croatia helps“organized a visit and a stay in Croatia for 22 children (and accompanying adults) from Iraq at the resort of the Croatian Red Cross on the Adriatic Coast this summer. The visit was provided with the financial assistance of the UNMAS and in the cooperation with the partners from Iraq. The majority of the children are direct victims of mines (or in some cases, improvised landmines) and they have been introduced to the program of mine risk education conducted by the Association. Firstly, there was an introduction to mine problem in the world and an introduction to mine problem in Croatia, with the special emphasis on the methods of education of different target groups, primarily children. Secondly, the children were shown the work of deminers in a mock mine field, including the equipment used in their everyday work. Thirdly, the children were introduced to the work of an explosive detection dog, presented by the Croatian Ministry of Interior’s Counter Explosive Department. During the mine risk education, Iraqi children were joined by their peers from the Sisak-Moslavina and Lika-Senj Counties, two of the most mine-affected counties in Croatia.

Thank you.