

Afghanistan and Switzerland - 2006 Co-Chairs of the Standing Committee on Victim Assistance and Socio-Economic Reintegration of the Ottawa Anti-Personnel Mine Convention (Mine Ban Treaty)

**7th Meeting of the State Parties (7 MSP)
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Social and Economical Reintegration of all victims

It is crucial to have access and good quality of medical care, from the first aid to the provision of functioning orthotics and prosthetics. But after a correct treatment of the medical and health needs of mine victims, their effective social and economic re-integration in society or communities is the next necessary step to ensure the fulfilment of the rights of the survivors and their families. Mine victims and, more generally, persons with disabilities, are too often still considered as a burden to society: their productive potential is usually not taken into account nor are their dignity and rights respected. Persons with disabilities normally pertain to the poorest and most disadvantaged category of people in poor countries, and to the socially most disadvantaged people in both developing and developed countries.

Numerous initiatives are under way and several specific projects are ongoing with regard to the issues at hand, which is an encouraging trend. The Co-Chairs have been particularly encouraging sharing and dissemination of information, advocacy and awareness rising.

Handicap International (HI), with the support of Switzerland and in collaboration with main players, carried out a study on “Good practices for economic inclusion of people with disabilities in developing countries – funding mechanism for self employment”. The study focus on innovative projects for self-employment and use of micro-finance schemes to support it.

Furthermore, in order to bring together stakeholders, the Co-Chairs organized a workshop on the 29th of June in which participated experts from ILO, LSNI, HI, UNICEF, UNMAS, UNDP, the Special Fund for the Disabled, ICRC, ICBL, and ISU-GICHD. In this occasion various issues were discussed like community-based approaches, the mainstreaming of disability issues, employment legislation, best practices in the field of economic reintegration and as well the issue of rights.

Economic reintegration is of paramount importance. Provided employment and self-employment opportunities for survivors will increase their self-esteem and their chances for social reintegration, adding economic capacity to mine affected community enhancing their process of self-recovery. The beneficiaries of the economic reintegration of mine victims are then not only the victims themselves, but also their families and finally their whole community which otherwise is depriving itself of a wide array of expertise, skills and talents.

Addressing this issue, we should bear in mind that societal barriers, prejudices and stigmas are themselves disabling, and due attention must be paid to developing community-based peer support groups, sporting and related activities, associations for disabled people so as to guarantee to persons with disabilities full inclusion and participation in all aspects of life.

It is very important indeed to integrate people with disabilities in the socio-economic programs linked with poverty reduction since this category of persons still suffers of too much exclusion. At this respect, the new International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, whose final text was adopted in August 2006 by the relevant AD-hoc Committee will be contribute to this goal.

The Convention can serve as a powerful instrument to the Victims Assistance obligations contained in the Mine Ban Treaty and has been supported by a number of Mine Ban Treaty States Parties. Disability rights reinforce landmine survivor assistance objectives.

Furthermore, it was already stated in the final report of the Nairobi review Conference in its paragraph 65 that “Victim Assistance does not require the development of new fields or disciplines but rather calls for ensuring that existing health care and social service systems, rehabilitation programmes and legislative and policy frameworks are adequate to meet the needs of all citizens – including landmine victims”. Paragraph 66 also highlights that “assistance to landmine victims should be viewed as a part of a country’s overall public health and social services systems and human rights frameworks”.

The Co-Chairs can only warmly encourage all governments to continue to support the implementation of programs that have as first aim the socio-economic reintegration of all the victims. We encourage in particular all member states in a position to do so to continue to finance Victims Assistance projects either in the form of targeted contribution or through integrated approaches in which development cooperation aims to guarantee the rights of all persons with disabilities including landmine survivors.