

Activities and Priorities for Implementation 2021-2022

Committee on Victim Assistance Algeria, Ecuador, Sweden and Thailand (Chair)

I. Activities of the Committee

1. On 15 December 2020, the Committee held its first meeting to discuss the work plan of the Committee in 2021. To ensure consistency in support of the States Parties with Victim Assistance responsibilities, the Committee looked at progresses and challenges observed in 2020, with input provided by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) in their role as Observers on the Committee.
2. As in 2020, the Committee decided to continue focusing on a specific thematic area based on common challenges reported by the States Parties. After a careful analysis and discussion, the Committee agreed to focus its efforts in 2021 on Action 35 of the Oslo Action Plan (OAP) to assist States Parties with Victim Assistance responsibilities to “establish or strengthen a centralised database that includes information on persons killed by mines as well as on persons injured by mines and their needs and challenges, disaggregated by gender, age and disability, and make this information available to relevant stakeholders to ensure a comprehensive response to addressing the needs of mine victims.”
3. On 12 January 2021, the Committee met to discuss the calendar of activities for 2021 and reiterated the importance of keeping the Committee’s work consistent with efforts made by the Committee and other stakeholders in 2020. In addition to focusing on Action 35, the Committee highlighted the need to continue supporting the 30 States Parties that have indicated having a responsibility for a significant number of survivors in areas under their jurisdiction or control, to ensure improved reporting including on matters related to consideration of gender and diversity in implementation of Victim Assistance efforts. The Committee also elected one of its members, Sweden, as the Gender Focal Point of the Committee on Victim Assistance for 2021.
4. On 15 January 2021, the Committee hosted a Victim Assistance retreat with participation of the Victim Assistance Coordinator (Spain) and the Cooperation and Assistance Coordinators (the Netherlands and Montenegro) of the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM), the Chair of the Committee on the Enhancement of Cooperation and Assistance of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (Colombia), the Implementation Support Unit of the CCM, the Secretariat of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, at the Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) and Humanity & Inclusion (HI). The retreat provided an opportunity for Victim Assistance stakeholders in Geneva to share their respective priorities and activities in 2021 and to promote a common understanding and cohesive approach in victim assistance.
5. During the months of February and March, the Committee held bilateral meetings with representatives of States Parties with Victim Assistance responsibilities (Angola, El Salvador, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Senegal, Somalia, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Uganda and Yemen) to exchange information on Victim Assistance implementation and reporting. The Committee welcomed this exchange with States Parties concerning their efforts to meet the needs of mine victims and the challenges they are encountering and expressed its full support to States Parties in this regard. The Committee informed the representatives of the States Parties

that the information contained in their annual Article 7 reports will serve as the main source of data to assess progress in implementation of the Convention and OAP Victim Assistance commitments. The Committee informed the respective States Parties that their information will be used to update the baseline value for all Victim Assistance indicators established at the Eighteenth Meeting of the States Parties (18MSP) and that progress in subsequent years will be compared to this baseline. The Committee encouraged submission of detailed information on Victim Assistance including on consideration of gender and diversity, through Article 7 reports, to ensure an accurate assessment of implementation of the OAP.

6. On 22-24 February 2021, support was provided to Colombia in hosting a “*National Stakeholder Dialogue in Colombia: Strengthening Participation and Inclusion of Victims of Mines and Unexploded Ordnance*”. The Dialogue was led by the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace (OACP) and it was held with the financial support of the European Union (EU) in accordance with the EU Council Decision (2017/1428), and with technical assistance of the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) of the Convention, in collaboration with the Committee. The Dialogue provided an opportunity for associations of mine victims to strengthen their participation and inclusion by fortifying the capacity of their national network. In addition, the Dialogue brought together representatives of various government agencies and civil society to provide inputs for the revision of Colombia’s Victim Assistance pathway (La Ruta).
7. On 5 March 2021, the Committee delivered a statement at the 23rd Meeting of the 46th Regular Session of Human Rights Council during their annual interactive debate on the rights of persons with disabilities on “participation in sport under Article 30 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)”. Given the theme of the session, the Committee’s intervention stressed the fact that social inclusion is an important pillar of Victim Assistance and that inclusion and participation of mine survivors in social activities, including in sports, is crucial in breaking negative stereotypes and in creating a more inclusive society. The Committee encouraged the States Parties to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention that have not acceded to the CRPD, to do so at the earliest opportunity.
8. On 8 March 2021, the Committee delivered a statement at the 24th session of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD Committee). In addition to sharing updates on the work of the Committee on victim assistance, the Committee encouraged the CRPD Committee to integrate Victim Assistance into its efforts and consider developing a General Comment on Article 11 of the CRPD. The Committee invited the CRPD Committee to assist the States Parties with Victim Assistance responsibilities not party to the CRPD, to accede/ratify it.
9. On 18 March 2021, the Committee participated in an Article 7 reporting workshop organised by the Committee on Cooperative Compliance to present the work of the Committee in 2021 and to reiterate to the States Parties the importance of including detailed information in their 30 April 2021 Article 7 reports. The Committee also provided States Parties with information on the tools available for States Parties to support their Victim Assistance reporting commitments.
10. On 23 March 2021, the Committee held a bilateral meeting with the Bureau of the CRPD Committee and exchanged on their respective work. The Committee encouraged the Bureau to consider the inclusion of questions in the list of issues regarding the situation of mine survivors and their inclusion and participation in the CRPD frameworks for all States with Victim Assistance responsibilities. The Committee reiterated its interests in a General Comment on Article 11 of the CRPD. Following the meeting, on 7 April 2021, the Committee sent a letter to the Chairperson of the CRPD Committee to thank her for the meeting and to express the Committee’s interests in strengthening cooperation in the promotion of Victim Assistance efforts and disability rights.

In response, on 8 June 2021, the Committee received a letter from the Chairperson of the CRPD Committee reiterating the interest of her Committee to continued collaboration between the two Committees. The CRPD Committee's Chairperson also assured the Committee of consideration of developing a General Comment on Article 11 in the future and of the inclusion of mine survivors in their work on the CRPD.

11. On 26 March 2021, the Committee sent a letter to States Parties to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention to share information on the work of the Committee on Victim Assistance in supporting "...States Parties in their national efforts to strengthen and advance Victim Assistance in particular in States parties with mine victims in areas under their jurisdiction or control" and provided information on its ongoing efforts in working closely with a "focus group¹" of 30 States Parties implementing Victim Assistance responsibilities². The objective of the letter was to invite other States Parties to participate in the work of the Committee and consider the possibility of joining the Victim Assistance focus group.
12. On 7 May 2021, the Committee together with Observer Members – the ICRC and ICBL – met with the new UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Gerard Quinn, and his team in follow up to a letter the Committee sent on 5 March 2021, to congratulate him on his appointment, inform him of the Committee's work and to build upon collaboration the Committee had enjoyed with his predecessor. The Committee and the Special Rapporteur exchanged information on their mandates, activities and priorities in 2021. The Special Rapporteur informed the Committee that he will be focusing on the protection of civilians with disabilities in situations of armed conflicts in 2021, and that he would welcome inputs on research that his team will be conducting in this regard. The Committee encouraged the Special Rapporteur to integrate Victim Assistance into his work on promoting the rights of persons with disabilities. The Committee also invited the Special Rapporteur to participate in Victim Assistance meetings of the Convention.
13. On 27 May 2021 and on 2 June 2021, the Committee met to discuss methodology, structures and division of tasks for the development of the Committee's preliminary observations on information submitted by the States Parties with Victim Assistance responsibilities. In lead up to the Intersessional Meetings during the months of May and June 2021, the Committee analysed the Victim Assistance information submitted by the States Parties in their Article 7 reports and prepared preliminary observations on the implementation of their Victim Assistance commitments. Preliminary observations were drafted by the Committee for: Afghanistan, Algeria, Angola, Cambodia, Chile, Colombia, Iraq, Jordan, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Peru, Senegal, South Sudan, Sudan, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkey, Yemen and Zimbabwe.
14. On 22 June 2021, at the Intersessional Meetings, the Committee hosted a thematic discussion on "*Victim Assistance: Establishing or Strengthening a Centralised Database*³" to highlight challenges faced in data collection and in establishing/strengthening national centralised

¹ Since 2004 Nairobi Summit, the work of the States Parties around Victim Assistance has led to an accepted view that while all States Parties "in a position to do so" have the primary responsibility to support mine victims in areas under their jurisdiction or control regardless of the number of mine victims, such responsibility is most pertinent in countries where States Parties themselves have indicated significant number of mine victims, which is noted as "hundreds, thousands or tens-of-thousands of landmine survivors". The concept of this focus group was inspired by collective effort in lead up to the Nairobi Summit and beyond to enhance Victim Assistance.

² Afghanistan, Albania, Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burundi, Cambodia, Chad, Colombia, Croatia, DRC, El Salvador, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau, Iraq, Jordan, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Peru, Senegal, Serbia, Somalia, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tajikistan, Thailand, Uganda, Yemen and Zimbabwe.

³ Thematic Session 4 – Victim Assistance: Establishing or Strengthening a Centralised Database, summary of the discussion and information shared by experts and States Parties are available at: <https://www.apminebanconvention.org/intersessional-meetings/june-2021/summary-and-statements/>

database in support of fulfilment of Action #35 of the Oslo Action Plan. The following experts – *Loren Persi, Riyad Naser Muhanna, Roberta Sarzano and Tabasum Akseer* – shared information including best practices, available resources and recommendations in relation to improving data collection, data sharing and unification of information collected by various government entities and stakeholders in mine-affected countries. The expert discussion was followed by updates on progress and challenges around implementation of Action #35 by the States Parties and organisations involved in Victim Assistance.

15. During the month of July 2021, the Committee prepared preliminary observations on new updates received from the following States Parties with significant number of mine victims: Chad and Sri Lanka. Also, the Committee circulated all the preliminary observations to the respective States Parties to seek further information or clarification. In response, 12 States Parties - Afghanistan, Algeria, Cambodia, Colombia, Iraq, Nicaragua, Peru, Senegal, Sudan, Turkey, Yemen and Zimbabwe - provided further information or clarifications, which is appreciated by the Committee.
16. During the months of September 2021, the Committee began preparations for the 2021 Victim Assistance Experts Meeting to provide an opportunity to experts in the States Parties with Victim Assistance responsibilities and other stakeholders to exchange information and best practices and to build on the previous years' momentum⁴. The Committee stressed the importance of data and looked at different modalities to ensure the Meeting will be inclusive and tailored to the needs of national experts.
17. In the lead up to the Nineteenth Meeting of the States Parties (19MSP) the Committee worked to analyse and prepare conclusions and recommendations on information submitted by 24 States Parties with Victim Assistance responsibilities - Afghanistan, Algeria, Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burundi, Cambodia, Chad, Colombia, Croatia, Iraq, Jordan, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Peru, Senegal, Serbia, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkey, Yemen and Zimbabwe - on their efforts to achieve the Victim Assistance objectives of the OAP.

II. Priorities for implementation

18. The Committee will continue prioritising reporting by States Parties and in particular encouraging those States Parties that have not submitted information on implementation efforts - Albania, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, El Salvador, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau, Somalia and Uganda – to submit reports as soon as possible and regularly by 30 April of each year.
19. The Committee will continue supporting States Parties in strengthening the quality of reports and in particular by encouraging the employment of the Guide to Reporting and ensure to implement and report on all aspects of Victim Assistance Actions of the OAP, in particular as it relates to multifaceted commitments such as:
 - a. the designation of a government entity to oversee development, implementation and monitoring of national action plan (Action #33);
 - b. the establish or strengthen a centralised database with disaggregated information made available to relevant actors (Action #35);
 - c. ensuring the availability of a national referral mechanism, including by creating and disseminating a comprehensive directory of services (Action #37); and

⁴ 2020 VA Experts Meeting: <https://www.apminebanconvention.org/en/meetings-of-the-states-parties/18msp/victim-assistance-experts-meeting/>

- d. ensuring access to comprehensive rehabilitation services and psychological and psychosocial support services, including the provision of assistive devices, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and peer-to-peer support programs (Action #38)
20. The Committee will continue to promote a cohesive approach to Victim Assistance and prioritise implementation of all OAP actions with a view towards sustainability and in particular its focus on ensuring States Parties strengthen the integration of Victim Assistance commitments into broader frameworks such as disability, human rights, health, education, development, poverty reduction, humanitarian response and other relevant frameworks such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). In addition, the Committee will continue to promote greater participation in the work of the Committee through inviting other States Parties to consider the possibility of joining the Victim Assistance focus group.
21. The Committee will also prioritise encouraging States Parties to report more how their implementation efforts ensure that the different needs and perspectives of women, girls, boys and men are considered and inform all areas of the Convention implementation and mine action programmes, in order to deliver an inclusive and context specific approach.
22. The Committee is concerned of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mine victims over the coming years, due to redirection of resources and priorities and encourage States Parties to take timely measures to address this challenge.
23. The Committee will also continue making use of the EU Council Decision in support of the implementation of the victim assistance related aspects of the Oslo Action Plan, including by proposing national and regional dialogues for its implementation.