

The Committee on Victim Assistance

Wednesday 27 November

09:00 – 12:00

Agenda item: 8. Review of the operation and status of the Convention (continued)

(d) Assisting the victims

Opening – report: Mateja Kavaš, Chair of the Committee on Victim Assistance:

1. Thank you, Madam María Soledad, for joining us and for reminding us of how important a human rights approach to victim assistance is.
2. Excellencies, esteemed colleagues, it is with a great pleasure that Slovenia takes the floor as Chair of the Committee on Victim Assistance to report on the work of the Committee. I would like to begin by extending my thanks to my colleagues on the Committee, Zambia, the Netherlands and Burkina Faso, for their work and collaboration this year as well as the two observer members of the Committee, the ICBL and the ICRC.
3. I would also like to acknowledge the invaluable expertise and support of the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) in assisting with the work of the Committee and the States Parties with victim assistance reporting and implementation.
4. At the Fourth Review Conference the work of the Committee was focused on 30 States Parties with significant number of mine victims in areas under jurisdiction or control, and in 2024 the Committee's work focused on 39 States Parties¹ implementing victim assistance. This is due to the fact that the Committee considers supporting any State Party that report mine victims in areas under its jurisdiction or control. We thank all the 39 States Parties with mine survivors in areas under their jurisdiction or control, for their cooperation with the Committee.
5. Excellencies, dear colleagues, while the overall number of casualties has decreased, unfortunately, thousands of new mine victims have been reported by the States Parties since the Fourth Review Conference, adding to the long list of survivors and affected families in need of assistance. A significant number of these new victims are children. Fatality rate of new casualties has been raised as an important issue and a concern that must be addressed through enhanced efforts.
6. The unfortunate fact of ongoing casualties reminds us of how important it is to do more to reduce new casualties, and to bring it to zero as soon as possible. It also reminds us of the growing number of new mine victims in need of assistance, a lot of whom in rural and remote areas with little to no access to basic services. Thus, the provision of first aid and emergency response are vital to reduce new fatalities. The Committee encourages the States Parties with ongoing casualties to expand access to first aid and other pre-hospital care in affected areas and invites the international community to enhance cooperation and assistance with affected States Parties, in this regard.
7. Excellencies, dear colleagues, we observe progress over the years in reports provided by the States Parties with mine victims. Although the extent of progress varies a lot among the States Parties, there

¹ Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burundi, Cambodia, Chad, Chile, Colombia, Congo DR, Croatia, El Salvador, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau, Iraq, Jordan, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Palestine, Peru, Senegal, Serbia, Somalia, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tajikistan, Thailand, Türkiye, Uganda, Ukraine, Yemen and Zimbabwe

are a few areas where the Committee observe positive patterns, and allow me to briefly point out some of them here:

- There is a greater understanding of victim assistance and the needs and rights of mine survivors, which has led to integrating victim assistance in broader national policies and programmes, especially those of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).
- Global developments such as the 2023 World Health Assembly's resolution on strengthening rehabilitation within health systems and the 2022 UN General Assembly's resolution on inclusive development for and with persons with disabilities as well as the last two global disability summits in recent years, among initiatives have been progressively creating positive environment, that benefit mine survivors along with other persons with disabilities.
- 30 States Parties reported having government entity with responsibility to coordinate victim assistance activities. The Committee welcomed the development of IMAS 13.10, a tool to assist the States Parties in strengthening shared responsibility and enhancing national ownership in victim assistance implementation.
- The World Health Organisation and other stakeholders such as Assistive Technology Scale (ATscale) have been calling for more attention to the growing need in rehabilitation and assistive technology. 29 States Parties have reported on efforts to increase the availability and accessibility of rehabilitation services, with some having refurbished or constructed new physical rehabilitation centres.
- 22 States Parties have reported efforts to increase the availability of psychological and psychosocial supports-supports, and the Committee has put efforts to draw attention to broader mental health and psychological support, aligned with the integrated approach outlined in the Oslo Action Plan. And 26 States Parties have reported efforts to improve social and economic inclusion including by removing barriers that hinder participation by mine survivors and persons with disabilities

8. The Committee welcome these and all other developments and invite all the States Parties with mine victims in areas under their jurisdiction or control and the international community to do more, to address challenges facing the implementation of victim assistance. Some of the challenges we in the Committee observed from the information provided by the States Parties, are as follows:

- National capacity to coordinate, plan and provide tangible support suffer from lack of expertise, specialists and resources in many States Parties with responsibility to implement victim assistance. Strong and well-resourced capacity is essential to ensure victim assistance is well integrated into relevant national frameworks, without which victim assistance risks losing momentum, especially following completion of mine clearance (Art.5).
- Collecting accurate and disaggregated national data in a manner to inform relevant national policies and programmes remain an important challenge for several States Parties, including

many with ongoing casualties. Unification of data into national database is one the commitments in the Oslo Action Plan yet little progress has been reported in this regard.

- When it comes to provision of tangible assistance such as healthcare, rehabilitation, occupational therapy, psychosocial support, and socio-economic inclusion, challenges had existed have been deepened by impact of COVID-19, increasing conflicts and other factors such as reduction in the ICRC's physical rehabilitation programme, and donors' fatigue. These created further pressures on national capacities to deliver such much needed services in an efficient, effective and sustainable manner
- Other areas that the Committee observed among least reported, are national directory of services, peer to peer support, referral systems and efforts to ensure national measures for protection and safety of mine survivors in situations of risks and emergencies. These are and continue to be important parts of victim assistance
- More work is needed to ensure full consideration of gender and the diverse needs and experiences of mine survivors, affected families and communities. and one of the challenges most reported by the States Parties has been the shortfalls of financial resources for victim assistance including for activities to facilitate integration of victim assistance

9. Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, the Committee on Victim Assistance, in accordance with its mandate, has carried several activities to assist the States Parties with fulfilling their Convention commitments. We are thankful to the States Parties for providing updates on their victim assistance efforts. We invite all the States Parties implementing victim assistance to provide comprehensive updates through their annual Article 7 Report and make use of the Guide to Report.
10. The Committee is pleased to have been in a position to convene *Victim Assistance Experts Meetings* on annual basis since Fourth Review Conference. The VA Experts Meeting has been highly regarded as a useful platform providing a much-needed space for substantial technical discussion on evolving concepts of victim assistance. Yesterday, the Committee hosted a VA Experts Meeting, where VA Experts from States were joined by experts from organisations and survivors representatives organisations to share lessons learned from the past five year, and to prepare for the implementation of the Siem Reap-Angkor Action Plan (SRAP).
11. Several of the States Parties including Colombia, Guinea-Bissau, Iraq, and Sudan hosted national dialogues on victim assistance, last year Cambodia hosted a global conference on victim assistance and in August this year Slovenia hosted a regional conference on victim assistance. We thank the European Union for its generous support for these activities. The Committee encourage continued dialogue and expert exchange of experience on victim assistance and disability rights.