

# Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction

---

Volume 17  
Issue 3 *The Journal of ERW and Mine Action*

Article 2

---

October 2013

## Landmine Injuries and Human Rights: The Terminology of Victims and Survivors

Cameron Macauley  
*Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at JMU (CISR)*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal>



Part of the [Other Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons](#), and the [Peace and Conflict Studies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Macauley, Cameron (2013) "Landmine Injuries and Human Rights: The Terminology of Victims and Survivors," *The Journal of ERW and Mine Action* : Vol. 17 : Iss. 3 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol17/iss3/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at JMU Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction by an authorized editor of JMU Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact [dc\\_admin@jmu.edu](mailto:dc_admin@jmu.edu).

# Landmine Injuries and Human Rights: The Terminology of Victims and Survivors

*"The words victim and survivor are not interchangeable. The word victim refers to someone who is the object of abuse and as such implies helplessness. It is correct to use victim when discussing someone who is injured by a landmine, but not someone who is in the process of recovering, since we do not consider that person to be helpless."*

~ Jerry White, co-founder of Landmine Survivors Network, November 2005<sup>1</sup>

by Cameron Macauley [ CISR ]



Ken Rutherford (left) and Jerry White (right), co-founders of Landmine Survivors Network, helped guide Princess Diana on her final humanitarian trip to Bosnia to meet landmine survivors and their families, 9 August 1997.

*Photo courtesy of Landmine Survivors Network/Survivor Corps.*

When landmine survivors Ken Rutherford and Jerry White argued for the inclusion of a victim assistance clause in the *Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction* (Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention or APMBC), they took an unprecedented step forward by helping to create the first arms treaty to

recognize the needs of the injured.<sup>2</sup> The language used in the APMBC has become the foundation for the debate on victims and survivors of explosions caused by landmines, unexploded ordnance and cluster munitions. Unheard of 20 years ago, victim assistance is now a field unto itself, and survivors from every conflict-affected nation have mobilized to campaign for the recognition of their rights.

Is there really a distinction between a victim and a survivor? Does this terminology make any difference, or is this just another quibble over semantics? Notably, the discussion assumes that the words we use will influence our thinking and that our thinking will influence the words we use.<sup>3</sup>

### Defining the Differences

In common parlance, the term **victim** implies the passive state of suffering harm, injury or death due to an accident or a crime. The victim does not act but is acted upon. In contrast, the term **survivor** implies a more active state: In addition to surviving an event that might have been fatal, often when others did not survive, the act of survival also encompasses the notion of persevering despite severe circumstances—in the case of landmine survivors, clinging to life despite blood loss, missing limbs and shock.

Rutherford and White took this distinction even further when they founded Landmine Survivors Network in 1997.<sup>4</sup> For them, **survivorship** is an inherently active state in which the struggle toward recovery drives survivors to help others recover, to campaign for the rights of people with disabilities and the rights of those affected by violent conflict, and to end the indiscriminate use of weapons that kill and maim civilians for years after a war is over.<sup>5</sup> A survivor works to make the world a better place by preventing others from suffering the years of physical and emotional agony inflicted by a landmine. This distinction between victim and survivor has become standard for those experiencing various types of trauma, which includes sexual violence, domestic violence and other violent crimes.<sup>6,7,8,9</sup>

But there is a less obvious distinction between victims and survivors of landmines. The landmine victim is not some hapless individual affected by a sponta-

neous event. A landmine is an explosive device deliberately created to maim or kill. Whether the victim is the target for whom the device was intended is irrelevant: Devices placed in areas where non-combatants may be present can cause devastating injuries or deaths to those working to rebuild peaceful societies. The injustice extends to the discrimination against and marginalization of people with disabilities when a landmine victim is denied employment and excluded from participating in society, and becomes powerless to improve his or her life.

The survivor helps others recover from landmine injuries by rebuilding self-confidence and by teaching autonomy and independence. The survivor educates those around him or her about the needless suffering inflicted by explosive remnants of war and how this suffering contributes to the desire for revenge and eventually, renewed violence.

Until now, our definition of a **landmine victim** was merely someone whose life was affected by a landmine. But the civilian landmine victim is also the helpless victim of war whose life is forever changed and whose new challenges are not limited to physical injury but also to overcoming discrimination and social isolation. Our definition of **landmine victim** should provoke us to take action to prevent further victimization and help turn victims into survivors. Victims are helpless, survivors are not: **Landmine survivors** serve as examples to all of us that the strength derived from adversity is a potent weapon. ©

See endnotes page 64

*Note: Ken Rutherford is the director of James Madison University's Center for International Stabilization and Recovery. Jerry White is the deputy assistant secretary for Partnerships and Learning at the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations. Both remain active in victim assistance and in promoting landmine survivors' rights.*



Cameron Macauley, MPH, joined CISR in August 2010 as its peer support and trauma-rehabilitation specialist. He holds a Master of Public Health as well as degrees in anthropology and psychology, and became a physician assistant in 1983. He has worked in a refugee camp on the Thai-Cambodian border, at a district hospital in Sumatra, as a Peace Corps volunteer in Guinea-Bissau, in Mozambique where he taught trauma surgery for landmine injuries, in an immunization program in Angola and in a malaria-control program in Brazil. Between 2005 and 2010, he taught mental health courses for Survivor Corps in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Jordan and Vietnam.

-----  
Cameron Macauley, MPH  
Peer Support and Trauma  
Rehabilitation Specialist  
Center for International Stabilization  
and Recovery  
James Madison University  
Tel: +1 540 568 4942  
Email: macaulcx@jmu.edu  
Website: <http://www.jmu.edu/cisr>