ICBL Working Group on Victim Assistance

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Landmine Survivors Network (LSN) currently chairs the ICBL Working Group on Victim Assistance. It is in this capacity, working together with over 20 humanitarian and development non-governmental organizations (NGOs), my ICBL colleagues and I welcome this opportunity to discuss Article 6 which compels States Parties responsibility to provide “care and rehabilitation, and social and economic reintegration of mine victims.” In February 1999, the ICBL set four main goals:

1) To press the international community to commit up to $3 billion over the next 10 years to support comprehensive victim assistance. (Note: the working group developed a matrix that outlines the baseline costs for comprehensive assistance; average estimated cost per survivor in mine-affected countries is roughly $9,800).

2) To support a wide range of assistance activities from acute care and physical rehabilitation to psychological support, vocational training and employment opportunities.

3) To promote sharing of information and assistance strategies among members to maximize the best possible rehabilitation outcomes for mine victims. (In the spirit of the Ottawa Process, ICBL continues to work closely and collaboratively with all major players on victim assistance).

4) To promote and involve mine victims and landmine-infected communities in the planning and implementation of mine assistance programs. (This follows the U.N. Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. “Nothing about us, without us,” as the saying goes in the disability rights movement).

To advance its goals, the ICBL Working Group has developed a set of programmatic guidelines to help promote meaningful victim assistance. Today, the ICBL is pleased to introduce the newly published ICBL Guidelines for the Care and Rehabilitation of Survivors. We ask all governments adhering to these guidelines. They were developed in broad consultation with international organizations and local NGOs to help diverse actors, including donors and program implementers, to develop and fund the most effective assistance programs.

Many ICBL members have been active in mined countries for decades, working to rehabilitate the injured. In fact, NGOs have been primary implementers in the field, providing physical rehabilitation and other support such as training and small enterprise. The ICBL welcomes the invitation to join consultations on the proposed Strategic Framework for Victim Assistance. The question now is how do we work together in the continuing spirit of the Ottawa Process? The ICBL will nominate key representatives to work in equal partnership with all States Parties, international organizations such as the ICRC, and U.N. agencies such as UNICEF and the World Health Organization.

Let us be clear that a public health care approach is an important perspective and framework, but not the only approach to victim assistance. As we have heard before, no one-size model fits all countries. We must be flexible and creative to meet the urgent needs of persons with disabilities. We can also try to define mine victims in several different ways, but one obvious starting point is to look into the eyes of survivors and their families struggling to overcome personal trauma. They need our help. Yes, there are many hurting people to help in the world, but it is imperative that all information-gathering must be to help governments make timely, informed and life saving decisions.

The ICBL looks forward to working in partnership with and full collaboration with governments during the next months to prepare and participate in inter-session meetings. The ICBL Working Group on Victim Assistance also maintains an important focal point for NGOs’ input and collaboration. We will be an active partner and important resource to ensure compliance with Article 6 of the Mine Ban Treaty.

At this conference, LSN will launch its new legal memorandum, State Responsibility for Landmine Survivor Assistance, during consultations on victim assistance. The legal memorandum, developed in cooperation with Arnold & Porter law firm, finds that, “States have binding obligations to prevent landmine injuries and to help rehabilitate mine-injured individuals and communities. Let us be very concrete and not forget this fact.”

Our general goal is to improve rehabilitation outcomes to return persons with disabilities to productive lives. It may start with surgery and medical care, but that is just a life-saving beginning. The ICBL believes we must underscore the clear treaty obligation to provide for social and economic reintegration.

Our challenge and philosophy is to treat the whole person, no matter how many limbs are missing. Prosthetics are important, but no cure-all. How do we offer appropriate psychological and social support? It is not easy to change societal attitudes toward the disabled, but we must raise awareness of the importance of investing in their future. This is good development policy, not simply charity.

In most mine-affected countries, less than 10 percent of persons with disability have access to proper medical care and rehabilitation services. Civic-based services are obviously not reaching the communities most in need. What can be done to improve access to quality services?

The ICBL Guidelines offer baseline recommendations for: emergency medical care, physical rehabilitation, prosthetics, psychological and social support, implementation, design and economic integration/capacity building and sustainability; legal and public awareness; access and data collection.

We applaud the Mozambican government’s initiative to address States Party responsibility to and to identify gaps, resources and funding needs. All States Parties are in a position to help. To make any strategic framework a reality for victims will require States Parties to contribute resources to NGO implementers, to track these contributions transparently and to monitor progress.

The Mine Ban Treaty needs legs, hands and eyes, concrete assistance that makes a difference in the lives of families held hostage to landmines. In the end it’s about action, not just commitments, declarations and data collection. We must guard against any interpretation of data collection as the same thing as real victim assistance. The ICBL Guidelines are clear on this point. The goal of all information-gathering must be to help governments make timely, informed and life saving decisions.

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A homemade prosthesis of wood and leather, made by a victim in an effort to return to productive life in Cambodia.