Summary of the session on Victim Assistance

The session was chaired by the Co-Coordinators of the Working Group on Victim Assistance, Afghanistan and Bosnia and Herzegovina, who called for renewed interest from the donor community towards victim assistance, considering that the life-long needs and rights of victims must still be fulfilled long after clearance and stockpile destruction are completed.

Five States Parties with cluster munition victims took the floor. Afghanistan spoke about its efforts to harmonize its national legislation on disability rights with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, but did not announce any timeframe for completing this task. Croatia spoke about its ongoing work to create a comprehensive database of victims and reported on peer-to-peer psychological support activities. Guinea-Bissau announced its signature of the CRPD and said its victim action plan was being prepared and would be presented at the Meeting of States Parties to the Mine Ban Treaty in December 2013.

Lao PDR said that by the end of the year, more than 15,000 UXO survivors will be tracked through its Survivor Tracking System, while data on the needs of survivors from the ten most affected provinces will be collected. Lao PDR also reported that the National Regulatory Authority’s victim assistance strategy was about to be finalized and would include a proposal for the NRA to work closely with the National Committee for Disabled People in order to address the needs of UXO victims in a broader context. Once the strategy is adopted, a cross-sectoral, inter-ministerial workshop will be convened.

Lebanon explained that the recent influx of refugees from Syria has strained an assistance system where resources were already very scarce. It reported on data collection efforts deployed with support from UNMAS and UNDP and said that upcoming results would inform victim assistance planning. It reported that it is “looking to integrate the implementation of the CCM victim assistance provisions in existing coordination mechanisms” created under the national law on “Access and Rights of Persons with Disabilities”.

Thailand, a non-signatory of the CCM, said that it has “incorporated all aspects of victim assistance, including emergency healthcare services and support for persons with disabilities, into relevant and existing national programmes” in order to ensure the sustainability of assistance, which has also proven to be a good way to prevent survivors from being marginalized.

A number of other States Parties also made statements. Australia said that in complement to its contributions to mainstreaming victim assistance through health and disability aid, it kept providing support for targeted victim assistance with an emphasis on assistance that is integrated into existing health, disability and human rights frameworks. In addition, it was working to ensure that mainstream support would have benefits for all, including landmine survivors. Austria called on all stakeholders to keep a focus on measuring progress, and said that exchanges between experts from disciplines such as medical care, psychological support or social and economic inclusion could help overcome implementation challenges. Austria also recommended the participation of survivors, their families and community members as experts in policy-making. Ecuador spoke about its survey efforts to collect data on victims and offered to share its expertise on victim assistance as part of South-South cooperation endeavors. Norway listed ways through which it promotes the inclusion of victims of cluster munitions and armed violence in fora outside the CCM.
While committing to “continue to provide funding for projects where victims of cluster munitions and landmines are the primary beneficiaries”, Norway also reiterated that international assistance provided to affected states should strengthen the national disability, development, public health and human rights frameworks if victim assistance is to be sustainable.

Afghanistan, Austria, Australia, Ecuador, Norway, Zambia, the Co-Coordinators of the Working Group, the UN Inter-Agency Coordination Group for Mine Action and the CMC all noted either directly or indirectly that the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) is an essential framework for ensuring that the rights of survivors are at the heart of victim assistance. Both Australia and the CMC also cautioned that the CRPD is not a panacea as not all victims are persons with disabilities.

The GICHD spoke about its work to develop victim-centric information management capabilities in the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA), which it said could facilitate the monitoring and management of victim assistance processes. Taking the floor on behalf of the CMC, Amelie Chayer reiterated the view that after needs assessments, governments together with victims should determine what programs already exist that could answer needs, while any gaps must be filled by creating new programs. This twin-track approach remains necessary in most countries.

Mentions of civil society

Afghanistan as Co-Coordinator made use of information from Cluster Munition Monitor in the opening of the session. Austria paid tribute to the continuous efforts of survivors, their organizations and civil society to promote victim assistance.