

Report on cooperation between governments and civil society organizations in providing support to the victims

Dear members of the state parties, signatory states and observer states,

In the beginning, I would like to greet you all on behalf of the Association of Amputees “UDAS” and me in person. It is my great pleasure to address you on behalf of the country I represent and on behalf of the victims of cluster munitions from Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).

Given the pleasure to present concrete examples of collaboration between governments and CSOs (civil society organizations), in this case disability organizations, it is important to point out the roles these organizations have in providing support to victims of cluster munitions and persons with disabilities in general.

We have to bear in mind that disability organisations act for, and on behalf of 15% of BiH population, who have a marginal status in the society. The role of disability organisations in the society is significant. They work to support persons with disability and are the main link between the government and persons with disability.

Disability organizations have always been closer to their beneficiaries and they have direct access to the victims and their needs. They are familiar with the issues and challenges the victims have to face on a daily basis and they provide specific services and support to the victims in order to facilitate their full participation in all segments of the society in BiH.

The Association of Amputees “UDAS” (hereinafter referred as to UDAS) is an organization established with the initiative by landmine survivors for landmine survivors with the purpose of providing psycho-social, health, educational, vocational and other kinds of support. It has around 4500 members, victims of the mines and cluster munitions in BiH. The leaders of the organization are the survivors themselves.

After the adoption of the Convention on the Cluster Munitions, UDAS took active participation in its implementation in BiH together with its government. Disability organizations and BiH government have a common goal to clear the area from the cluster munitions and to provide assistance to the victims with purpose to fully reintegrate them in the mainstream of the society.

Examples of good practice

BiH ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2009, and thus ensured the practical application of international disability standards. According to the international documents, standards have been established which brought to the creation of the Disability Policy. On the basis of this document, the Republic of Srpska (RS) adopted the

strategy entitled “Strategy for Improvement of Social Status of Persons with Disabilities 2010-2015”, and Federation of BiH adopted the strategy entitled “Strategy for Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities 2010-2015.”

BiH has also signed the Mine Ban Treaty in 1998, and as it is already known, the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM).

The goal of disability organizations is to provide support to all levels of BiH government in bringing the legislation in line with the CRPD and CCM.

The Council of Persons with Disabilities has been formed on the state level. It is comprised of the representatives of disability organizations and state government, and representatives of the entity ministries. The role of the Council is to monitor the process of the legislation in accordance with the CRPD, application of the adopted entity strategies, and to provide assistance on the same purpose.

As for the disability organisation at the local level, committees are created to coordinate the work and cooperation of disability organisations with local authorities. Some of the local governments develop and adopt activity plans for persons with disabilities. On the other hand, these organisations have big problems with funding and they can barely survive, which has an adverse effect on their influence in the society.

The link between the RS Government and disability organisations is the inter-sectorial body of the Government, whose main role is to create disability policies and strategies. It filters the regulations proposed to the Government and National Assembly. This inter-sectorial body has representatives of the RS ministry and only one representative of Coordination Board of RS Disability Organizations. There is no such body in Federation of BiH.

The Vocational Rehabilitation, Training and Employment of Persons with Disabilities Act, which was adopted in both entities is a good example of institutional model. The fact that both entity governments have founded the *Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities Funds*, has helped to create conditions for employment of persons with disabilities. New enterprises for employment of persons with disabilities are being founded. A certain number of private employers apply for benefits in employment of persons with disabilities and the process has started of recording the employment of persons with disabilities. Certain funds are also accumulated for providing benefits to employers. This is the first time that we have agencies and web sites that focus on this population.

The positive thing is that legal preconditions are created for building the society with equal opportunities for persons with disability and thus for the victims of cluster munitions, but on the other hand, it has to be noted that the implementation of aforementioned strategies in practice is still not on the satisfactory level. The local legislation is still not harmonised with international documents and victims still suffer various types of discrimination.

Cooperation of disability organizations with all levels of the government is of general interest to all, especially to victims of cluster munitions. The ultimate goal is that the victim becomes

a citizen with equal rights and opportunities and active participation in local community with its other members.

UDAS activities in 2011:

Most of the following actions are supported by the entity governments:

- Education of the support teams for the survivors of the cluster munitions. Altogether, 5 teams have been educated and among them, there are 4 persons who are victims of cluster munitions.
- We have been working with the rehabilitation and medical institutions to include peer support in their programs (victims helping victims).
- Training on peer support for the newly founded association of the victims of cluster munitions in Niš, Serbia. The training was attended by 25 survivors of cluster munitions. This action has ensured sustainability because the victims will be in position to provide peer support service and training to other victims in the community and around the country, as well as influence the process of ratification of the CCM by The Republic of Serbia.
- We have provided support for 12 survivors of cluster munitions to start up or expand small businesses (livestock or agriculture), which will be run by themselves or their families.
- Together with the Government, we have been working on the creation of the Soldiers' Rights Act, Pension and Disability Insurance Act and Social Protection Act. The Association was the member of the working group for the creation of texts for these acts, and thus it had the direct influence on their creation.
- 64 persons with disability have received legal support in terms of legal counseling and writing requests
- We are the main holders of the project of mental health in BiH. The trainings will be conducted together with 7 associations dealing with persons having psychological difficulties related to war trauma.
- School of painting and drawing for children with and without disabilities. The school is attended by 58 children. The ultimate goal is to influence on other disability organizations to be the initiators of other activities in their communities. Therefore, through direct interaction of children with and without disabilities we are breaking the barriers between persons with disabilities in a society which is full of prejudices and intolerance to them.
- 13 independent and 2 collective exhibitions of artists with and without disability have been organized in the UDAS gallery. The gallery was visited by 1500 people in the last year and

during the each one we have pointed out the problem of cluster munitions and its effects on the society.

- The first art colony of women with and without disabilities. 18 women took part in the project, of which there were 8 with some kind of disability. One of the themes of the colony was the role of women as victims of war.
- We are members of LAMD Coalition (Coalition for the Inclusion of Anti-Mine Action in BiH Development Programs); we have also become members of the network of peace, as well as network of disability organizations in BiH. Through these networks, we want to increase the impact of survivors in disability movement BiH.

Limitations and challenges

- Lack of the survivors' involvement in the processes of persons with disabilities in BiH; small number of associations with survivors as the leaders.
- Insufficient support of all levels of government to the programs and projects of the disability organizations.
- Poor implementation of domestic legislation related to victims and persons with disabilities in practice.
- Implementation of the CRPD and adopted strategies is not on a satisfactory level.
- Disability organisations cannot compete equally with civil society organisations which do not deal with disability issues.
- There is not a single register of disability organisations, so we do not know the exact number of these organisations.
- Unfair competition and rivalry as mutual distrust is seen in practice, which leads to a poor cooperation and disintegration of the disability movement. Low levels of education of persons with disabilities and small numbers of highly educated personnel who are ready to take active part in the work of organisations.

Recommendations:

- Provide training of employed members of disability organisations in order to build disability organisations' capacities. Develop and strengthen mutual cooperation between disability organisations, which will be based on joint principles. Continuously built capacities of the staff working in disability organisations, provide professional advancement to members of organisations and promote and support survivors to be leaders of these organizations.

- Continuous work on improvement of partnership between government and disability organizations, especially on the local level
- Increase budgetary funds for the survivors of the cluster munitions, assistance and programs of socialization
- Promote CCM, develop grants for disability organizations related to support for the victims of cluster munitions, and develop new programs of support and reintegration to the society