



**United Nations Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action
(IACG-MA)
Intersessional Meeting of the Convention on Cluster Munitions
Geneva 15-18 April 2013**

Statement on Victim Assistance

**Delivered by the United Nations IACG-MA
Tuesday, 16 April 2013**

Mr. Coordinators (*Afghanistan and Bosnia and Herzegovina*),

I deliver the following statement on behalf of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group for Mine Action (IACG-MA) comprising 14 UN entities involved in mine action.

The United Nations was encouraged during the Third Meeting of States Parties in September 2012 that the majority of the 16 States Parties and signatories with obligations under Article 5 reported on significant progress, including in implementing relevant actions in the Vientiane Action Plan. It was especially encouraging to hear of action undertaken aimed at enhancing the accessibility, availability and awareness of services and projects advancing the social and economic inclusion of cluster munitions victims.

Alongside these positive developments, the United Nations is also aware that critical challenges remain. The Oslo Progress Report highlighted the following challenges:

- the need to involve victims and their representative organizations in the policy development and practical implementation of victim assistance measures within decision-making processes at both national and local levels;
- the need to maximize the potential for cooperation between States Parties and civil society actors on the ground; and
- the need to foster collaboration across all relevant international legal instruments, with particular reference to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), to ensure that the rights of survivors are respected.

Community-based and participatory approaches as well as close partnerships with civil society are proven ways to have a positive impact and serve as important lessons to apply to these challenges. Furthermore, the CRPD represents an important guiding framework to address effectively the needs and fulfill the rights of all persons with disabilities, regardless of the cause of disability. As such, the United Nations warmly congratulates the new accessions of Afghanistan, Albania and Cambodia – all mine and ERW affected states - to this Convention.

Beyond these, a further, formidable challenge relates to meeting the assistance needs of victims of explosive weapons more generally. The Secretary-General has repeatedly drawn attention to the appalling humanitarian impact associated with the use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas. Moreover, the Secretary-General has called on parties to conflict to refrain from using explosive weapons with wide area impact in such areas and to engage in discussions to prevent unacceptable and indiscriminate harm to civilians.

Dear Colleagues,

The United Nations remains deeply committed to supporting victim assistance efforts.

Alongside the daily engagement by United Nations programmes in affected countries, victim assistance has been incorporated as one of the four strategic objectives of the new *United Nations Mine Action Strategy for 2013-2018* as a commitment to undertake relevant activities so that “comprehensive support is provided by national and international actors to mine and ERW, including cluster munitions, victims within broader responses to injury and disability.”

Accordingly, support by the United Nations includes, amongst other activities, advocacy for the adoption and implementation of laws and policies that guarantee the rights of persons with disabilities and the provision of guidance and technical assistance to improve age and gender-appropriate access to integrated and holistic victim assistance services. UN support also includes the mobilization of resources along with facilitation and assistance in support of survivors and other victim’s needs for emergency medical care and longer term physical rehabilitation, psychosocial support, social inclusion, education, economic reintegration and care and protection.

In order to best inform the United Nations approach to victim assistance, as announced last week, we are about to undertake a review of the UN Policy on Victim Assistance (2003). This Policy will be updated later this year following a wide consultative process taking into account new developments in International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, including the CRPD. We expect the revised policy will enable the United Nations to contribute more effectively to the development of sustainable national frameworks for addressing the needs and rights of persons with disabilities, including mine and ERW victims.

The United Nations is indeed convinced that in the long run the only sustainable way to assist mine and ERW, including cluster munitions, victims is by ensuring the integration of victim assistance into broader national disability, public health, poverty reduction, development and employment-related frameworks.

Furthermore, the implementation of national ongoing injury surveillance systems, whether on indiscriminate weapons specifically or on injury more generally, can provide a wealth of information to strengthen the provision of assistance to survivors, including identifying the demographic groups and geographic areas most affected while enabling the adaptation to age and gender-specific services and evidence-based allocation of assistance to those with the greatest needs.

With these points in mind, the United Nations continues to support a twin-track approach that focuses on mainstreaming disability, as a crosscutting issue, in all aspects of programming within the framework of the CRPD, alongside targeted victim assistance interventions in the short-term to support mine and ERW, including cluster munitions, victims.

The new UN Strategy 2013-2018 will build on this approach with the ultimate aim to provide national governments with the tools to develop and implement strategies on victim assistance embedded in national policies and adequately supported by national institutions.

The United Nations looks forward to continuing working in close collaboration with all of you.

Thank you