

Video message by cluster munition survivor from Lao PDR

[in Lao with English subtitles]

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Chue Por Vange, 31, Laos

My name is Chue Por Vange and I come from Laos, the most cluster munition-affected country in the world. I am happy that I can speak to you, delegates of this important conference. I hope my message and my personal story will reach you and motivate you to continue and improve your important fight against cluster munitions everywhere in the world.

It was in 2007, I was still in high school grade 5. During school holidays, I went out with two friends to find food from the forest and catch fish from the river. Suddenly, I noticed a beautiful shiny ball on the riverside. My friends were in a distance from me while I was starting to explore it... I cannot remember what happened then. I was told later that my friends had called my family and villagers to come and save me. They brought me to the provincial hospital. The doctor told my parents that they have to cut my arm to save my life and they gave them permission. I woke up after three days and felt strong pain, my ears were not hearing properly and I was very upset when I was told that my arm had been cut. I stayed in the hospital for a big while - but then my family run out of money and had to take me out from the hospital. To pay for my treatment, my family had to sell all cattle and even borrow from relatives, and they spent years to pay back the debt.

After the accident, I had to drop out of school due to the long absence. I could not work in the farm as I usually do without my arm. It took me eight years to fully get back to life. Even though, I learned to do things with one arm only, I still cannot do many tasks that I am expected to do as a breadwinner for the family. Because I could not finish my education, I cannot apply for a job. My only option is to work at the farm, raise cattle and do the labor work that I can afford.

Recently I was attending a workshop on victim assistance, where I learned that the government had many policies to support survivors like me. So I brought that information to share with other persons with disabilities in my community. I am very happy to know that our government is in the process of developing a national strategy for victim assistance and shows high willingness to support us. I also would like to say that our government and all other states where survivors live should pay even more attention to us. Many survivors live in the rural areas and are still very poor.

Victim Assistance is important and should always allow survivors and survivor's organizations to participate in the development process. We survivors have experienced the accidents, so we know best what it means and what was necessary to survive. We also know what our needs are as well as our strength and our difficulties.

I ask all of you at this Review Conference of the Convention on Cluster Munitions to do all you can so that cluster munitions will never again hurt or kill anyone, and to remember those that have been affected – like me and my community – and our continued needs.

Thank you!