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Thank you.

This Convention acknowledges the responsibility of States Parties to provide assistance to survivors and affected communities, but it also recognizes their right to live in a world free from the devastating impact of cluster munitions, and emphasizes the need to put an end to further the suffering and continuing casualties that the weapon invariably causes. As reported by the Monitor, the past year saw a massive increase in the number of new casualties from cluster munition attacks. While these victims all occurred in non-signatory countries, the devastating toll that cluster munitions take on lives and livelihoods further underscores the urgent need for comprehensive cluster munition victim assistance programs in States Parties to the convention, and more broadly in all places where there are significant needs.

The victim assistance article of the convention encompasses a wide range of services and support aimed at addressing the physical, psychological, and socio-economic impacts of cluster munition incidents, and living in contaminated areas. At the heart of these efforts is the respect for the rights and integrity of cluster munition victims, beyond simply checking off boxes to comply with an obligation. The convention's current action plan provides a roadmap for governments, as well as the complementary activities of non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders in prioritizing activities to reach those most in need.

Victim assistance requires a holistic and integrated multi-sector approach that includes the broader efforts of key actors outside of the mine action community as well as the specific efforts undertaken by the mine action sector. Providing gender- and age-sensitive, assistance that is non-discriminatory is an obligation that involves promoting equality and enjoyment of rights on an equal basis to others. This includes not only disability sensitive programming, but broader considerations of diversity and intersectionality. Is this level of attention to needs being acted upon? Certainly not to the extent required by survivors and affected communities.

Action 35 of the Lausanne Plan requires States Parties to facilitate the socio-economic and educational inclusion of cluster munition victims with employment referrals, access to micro-finance, livelihood support and social protection programs. Socio-economic inclusion plays an essential role in the processes of recovery and full participation in society on an equal basis to others. Skills training, vocational education, and job placement services enable survivors to rebuild their lives economically and restore their sense of purpose. By empowering survivors to gain confidence and security while countering discrimination, these programs can also tackle marginalization and foster more inclusive and resilient societies.

Yet few such programs are actually available. Moreover, in order to reach, or access, those existing programs, cluster munition victims will often require extensive health and rehabilitation services, which are alarmingly declining in availability in many countries, especially due to economic crisis

in States Parties: Afghanistan, Lebanon, and Somalia. Available reporting indicates that despite the achievements to date many cluster munition victims, and survivors live in precarious conditions.

International organizations and local partners continued to fill major gaps. The newest State Party, South Sudan has seen that international NGOs are responsible for 80% of health service delivery in the country.

Although we recognize that progress in guaranteeing rights can take time, we find it appalling that in most countries survivor networks that have been the backbone of community-based efforts, are still struggling to provide services.

Sustained international support, targeted financial investments, and technical expertise are essential to overcome the barriers and ensure that no survivor is left behind. Leveraging existing tools and resources including the IMAS on Victim Assistance and the Lausanne Action Plan, as well as synergy with the Mine Ban Treaty, human rights law, and the recent declaration on explosive weapons in populated areas is valuable.

We thank Gambia for leading the inclusive process of revising the Article 7 reporting template to improve the understanding of progress and challenges. States Parties can use the victim assistance template most effectively by reporting changes that occurred in the life of cluster munitions victims during the reporting period, rather than focusing mostly on laws, policies, and coordination mechanisms.

In these challenging times, your dedication to supporting, implementing, and reporting on comprehensive and integrated victim assistance remains vital.