

Dear Directors, Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentleman,

Please allow me to extend a most warm welcome to all of you participating in the eleventh international meeting of mine action programme directors and United Nations advisers on behalf of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Slovenia, the International Trust for De-mining and Mine Victims Assistance and on my own behalf.

I am very pleased and honoured to be invited to chair the Session on the Mine Victims Assistance and Rights of Survivors and persons Affected by Explosive Remnants of war.

Currently, we are witness to an extraordinary achievement in the history of the United Nations' efforts to protect Human Rights. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities received its 20th ratification on 3 April 2008 and will thus enter into force in the beginning of May. This marks a

major milestone in the effort to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of persons with disabilities, many of whom are victims of war or armed conflict.

Contamination with mines and other explosives degrades the basic pre-conditions of socio-economic development and improvement of living conditions. Without the elimination of these threats there can be no serious progress in economic development and social cohesion in the affected areas. Many countries are expected to be free of mines already in the coming years. But landmine survivors will require additional and also long-term support in their efforts to live normal lives. The support of physical and socio-economic rehabilitation demands our lifelong commitment.

Through special programs and therapies, these victims must be helped to regain their identity and to reintegrate into society. On the way towards full participation of landmine survivors and

persons with disabilities in general, medical and social rehabilitation are crucial steps. Referring to the UN Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, both are considered as pre-conditions for equal participation.

Before introducing the topics of today's session, I would like to express how proud we are of the success of the **International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance (ITF)**, and its contribution to humanitarian and development assistance in the region and beyond in the last decade.

Rehabilitation of mine victims is an important component of the program implemented by the ITF.

In the past ten years, nearly 14 and a half million US dollars were spent on the Mine Victims Assistance and Mine Risk Education programs; approximately 6 percent for the assistance and approximately 1 percent for the awareness raising activities, with the latter slowly increasing.

The ITF Mine Victims Assistance program is thus implemented on three different levels:

- I. Rehabilitation of mine victims from the region of South-Eastern Europe and other mine affected countries at the Slovene Institute for Rehabilitation. 840 patients received treatment and rehabilitation in Slovenia so far;
- II. Other Mine Victims Assistance and Mine Risk Education programs are implemented by various NGOs in South - Eastern Europe and other mine affected countries. Rehabilitation was also carried out in the rehabilitation centers in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including the examination and triage of patients (**112 mine victims were rehabilitated through ITF in BIH centers**)
- III. Capacity building - An important part of the activities is also education and training of professionals from the region of South Eastern Europe and other mine affected countries (Caucasus region). As a health care

institution, the Institute for Rehabilitation of the Republic of Slovenia has been establishing active professional contacts with most of the rehabilitation centres in the region of South-Eastern Europe.

The fact is that this kind of training is scarcely provided anywhere else in SE Europe, while qualified people of this profile are sorely lacking in the region. The development of local structures and capabilities is crucial for these countries in order to take ownership of the problem and provide their people with long-term solutions.

Since 1998, 466 different experts from Southeast Europe, Azerbaijan and Georgia attended training or seminars organized by the Institute either in Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina or abroad. The educational component of the work of the Institute for Rehabilitation in Ljubljana includes a graduate and postgraduate program, as well as clinical training

programs in physical medicine and rehabilitation, prosthetics, orthotics and occupational medicine.

In recent years ITF MVA component gained a **global perspective**. As in the region of SEE, ITF approaches MVA activities on the global level in an integral way and strives to ensure coherent implementation of MVA projects in Colombia, Vietnam and Jordan. ITF thus contributes to the enhancement of health and living conditions of mine survivors, their families and communities also in other mine affected parts of the world and is working diligently to transfer its knowledge and experience to other war torn countries in need of assistance.

Ladies and Gentleman,

Today's session will revisit the UN inter-agency policy of addressing the full range of rights of survivors within the context of national programmes that address the needs of all persons with disabilities and in accordance with international human rights standards.

Speakers will;

(1) introduce a set of draft tools compiled to assist mine action authorities to advocate for ratification and compliance with the convention on the rights of persons with disabilities and to guide programmes in advancing the aims of the convention;

(2) update on efforts to ensure that the needs and rights of survivors and other persons with disabilities are addressed comprehensively in Sudan;

(3) describe the challenges and successes of victim assistance

efforts in Cambodia; and

(4) introduce a new database on e-mine designed to facilitate reporting to human rights treaty bodies as per strategic objective 3.

It is my pleasure to introduce the speakers at the panel.

1. Mr. Plamenko Priganica, Office Director, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Landmine Survivors Network,

(...who will present the draft advocacy package on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.)

2. Mr. Davide Naggi, UN Mine Action Office, Sudan,
UN Human Security Trust Fund Victim Assistance Project in Sudan.

(...who will present the project aiming at (1) data collection on

the needs of survivors and the services available, (2) shaping of national work plans and strategies, and (3) implementing pilot interventions to address the rights of survivors and persons with disabilities)

3. Mr. Chan Rotha, National Director, Cambodia

(...who will present the efforts to advance the rights of survivors in Cambodia.)

4. Mr. Richard Kollodge, Information Unit Manager, from The United Nations Mine Action Service

(..... who will introduce the human rights treaty reporting database of the UNMAS on E-MINE (internet site)

The conclusions of the discussions will be summarised by Mr Richard Kollodge, the rapporteur from our session.