

## 2. Side Event by HI

### **“The Way Forward for Victim Assistance: an Integrated Approach”**

Presentation by Margaret Arach Orech- Ugandan Survivor at 20<sup>th</sup> International Meeting of National Mine Action Programme Directors and United Nations Advisers, - Geneva 7 February 2017

Good afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a pleasure to join you at this session as we share and explore ways for an integrated approach to victim assistance.

As a survivor, looking at an integrated approach to victim assistance, various aspects have to be taken into consideration by states. Linking with the components of victim assistance, it is inevitable that while physical rehabilitation, health, psychological support, economic reintegration etc are key to survivors reintegration, other related areas that are barriers and limits participation of survivors in the day to day life be taken into consideration. For many states, Victim Assistance falls under Mine Action but this seems to be getting lost along the way as gradually states complete clearance of contaminated areas and is declared Mine Free, yet survivors will always be there. The decline in funding is more compounded in states that have declared completion of contaminated or mined areas

Through international cooperation, funding for Mine Action ideally would include a fraction for VA and in some instances, direct VA funding. We are now seeing a likely decrease in this trend as donor funding is low and there are shifts in priorities and changes within Policies by States. Some states are often **“not in a position to do so”** regarding VA and look to development partners to support their interventions. With Such intervention if any mostly targeting persons with disabilities in general leaving survivors who are termed “emerging disability categories” and not yet well versed in disability politics. Development aid funding should reach landmine survivors as it reaches persons with disabilities. Be disability inclusive in totality. As it appears, the realities of survivors’ plight are not in the minds of donor states and Donor agencies. This is the reason why we need a Victim Assistance specific funds as mine action was the only channel that survivors were able to tap into for support.

Coordination of activities by various stakeholders in Victim Assistance is important as it helps to reduce on duplication and making the most of scarce resources. States should take the lead and be responsible as it too will ensure sustainability rather than leaving this role to INGO or NGOs.

From an integrated approach to Victim Assistance, ULSA works closely with the District leaderships, Community Development Officers and Unions for Persons with Disability to plan activities for survivors in our areas of operation. The district council for disability also has representation of survivors. This collaboration makes it easy for survivors to be included in district programs and in District Planning meetings. At the forefront, we promote the rights of survivors and persons with disabilities as is our goal.

When identifying beneficiaries for a project, ULSA works with district leadership and they are also included during monitoring exercises. The beneficiaries include both persons with disabilities, survivors and their families as indirect victims. ULSA takes into consideration gender and age in the selection process. We also consider family members of survivors who themselves are not able to undertake training or activity due to age or extent of disability. Our priorities for selection are survivors who have not yet benefited from any kind of supports in the past years.

Besides coordination meetings which were held between mine action operators, ULSA uses every available forum where its staff is participating to raise awareness on the plight of survivors. A more practical one has been at the Directors Forum (for Disabled Persons Organization) where issues that affect every disability category is raised and channeled to relevant office for redress. An example is where ULSA made input on the Shadow Report on Periodic Peer Review presented at the UN on 16 October 2016 citing Emerging Concerns on Rights of Persons Living with Disabilities in Uganda.

The location of Victim Assistance within a given government Ministry if well strategically placed can ensure continued support to survivors even when traditional Mine Action Centers cease to be operational as is the case with my country Uganda. For an integrated approach to VA, relevant line ministries should be identified and tasked with setting desks specifically for Disability of which survivors are likely to benefit and access services if awareness is made through advocacy of such departments by concerned ministries. This is quite relevant in areas where decentralization of services helps to improve access to services by survivors, vulnerable and marginalized persons in hard to reach areas. Such ministries would include but not limited to health, education and sports, works and transport, housing, water and environment, information as well as local government. This is a positive area where Uganda has excelled and makes political space available for a selected number of persons with disabilities from Parliament to the grass root level for inclusive participation.

As stipulated in the Maputo Action Plan, all States Parties are encouraged to seize every opportunity to improve victim assistance at all levels. It is an obligation, work with survivors, enhance their capacity and insure their inclusion and active participation in Mine Action.