

**Speech by Margaret Arach Orech , Survivor from Uganda at Opening Ceremony of 20th International Meeting of National Mine Action Programme Directors and United Nations Advisers,  
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Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, allow me to extend my appreciation to UNMAS and Handicap International for creating space and facilitating my participation at this important meeting as a survivor. It's now 18 years since I became a victim of antipersonnel landmine. Difficult as the journey has been and is always the case for many survivors, I am happy to say there has been a tremendous change towards the right direction in Victim Assistance. The achievements brought about, with concerted efforts by donor states, affected states, UN entities; the ICRC, ICBL-CMC and likeminded organizations are what we can all take pride in. Not to make us relax but even forage further till the acceptable standards for Victim Assistance reaches all survivors in their respective countries.

Looking back to the years I have participated in MBT and CMC meetings, VA has evolved to see more survivor participation and states taking up their obligations towards VA in broader way. In the early years, a few select countries (20 -26) were taken to measure how effective VA was being implemented. States met to share progress, plans; challenges faced and propose way forward on their obligation to VA. Now affected states are developing Action Plans for Victim Assistance and where applicable including such plans in broader national disability action plans, with input from survivors as well.

Here are some of the remarkable changes I can mention:

- Survivor participation as opposed to survivor presence during the meetings has improved. Before, we were here to share our testimonies. A reality that in a way helped stakeholders to tailor their programs to meet survivors needs. Now, survivors are more empowered and take on active roles in advocacy, planning and monitoring of VA in their respective countries, region and even at international meetings. In some countries, survivor works with organizations that plan activities for them at various levels i.e ICBL-CMC. In Uganda survivors have participated in drawing up the Plan of Action for Victim Assistance as well as monitoring of Victim Assistance. Survivors have also been involved in implementation of some government programs targeting persons with disabilities in general

-Presence and participation of Victim Assistance representatives from states during plenary on VA. This was not the case way back in 2000 when I first attended the MBT and related meetings. With continuous advocacy by survivors, I inclusive, we have seen the positive change in representation of government

delegates during VA sessions during the plenary and for follow up creation, of National Focal Persons on Victim Assistance. Representatives from VA related government ministries are involved in meetings.

-Synergy with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has enhanced access to survivor's rights though survivors still have to demand for this. Focusing on non-discrimination in providing victim assistance, programs are now designed inclusive of persons with disabilities and not a stand alone as before. Advocacy is now on VA to be integrated in existing developmental programs including health and rehabilitation.

- Gender perspective is now more pronounced than before.

With all the areas highlighted, continuous shortfall in earmarked VA funding still curtails some of the activities geared to ensure full inclusion of survivors within their respective communities. Ensuring Survivor's quality of life is an integral part of Mine Action. Survivors have lost irreparable body parts; help them cope with what is left so that they are productive. The notion that "Mine Free is Victim Free" should not be entertained in Mine Action planning. Survivors will need support for the rest of their live. In line with the theme for this meeting; "Needs –Driven, People- Centered" let us all channel our efforts towards alleviating the suffering caused to survivors and indirect victims by these indiscriminate weapons.

Thank you for listening.