

**Third Review Conference of the Mine Ban Treaty
Maputo, Mozambique**



**Statement on Victim Assistance
24 June 2014**

Thank you Mr/Ms Chair.

The Mine Ban Treaty has been remarkably successful in establishing a norm against the use of antipersonnel landmines. This has saved countless lives. It is also the first disarmament treaty to recognize the rights that victims have and to establish expectations that these rights will be upheld and the needs of victims met.

As an antipersonnel landmine survivor, I have lived through the pain caused by an incident with this weapon, and I continue living with social discrimination and physical barriers. I am also a witness to the pervasive and sometimes systematic violation of the most basic and fundamental rights of survivors and other persons with disabilities. I feel the moral imperative to demand that States Parties move beyond the talk that we have all already heard; to move to concrete actions that will fulfill victim assistance commitments and guarantee our rights.

It is important for all states to join the Mine Ban Treaty, as well as other instruments protecting human rights such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and to create new national laws based on these obligations. But if these laws are not implemented and enforced, they become just words on paper and, in the end, survivors and other persons with disabilities continue their lives with the same struggles. Please, we, the survivors here today, ICBL campaigners and civil society, no longer want to hear speeches of goodwill. If you talk about creating new laws or plans to assist survivors by promoting our rights and meeting our needs, also say that you have the resources to implement those plans -- otherwise, it is just another speech.

Survivors and other persons with disabilities should not be looked upon as objects that must be repaired or rehabilitated. Instead, look at us as people just like everyone here: a person with rights, with inherent dignity as sacred as anyone's and the right to participate in all decisions that affect us. Our disability is just a condition and when that is understood, it will also be understood that assisting survivors and their families is not just about writing laws, healing their wounds, and rehabilitating them. Victim assistance, in any and all frameworks through which it is implemented, must go further. It must ensure that survivors have the opportunity to have a dignified life, to be included in their family and their community, and to participate in all aspects of their country -- economically, politically, and in every other way.

How, you may ask, is this best achieved?

We survivors are not asking for pity, charity or favors. We are asking governments to take actions to uphold our rights just like everyone else's; our rights to go to school, have a job, access health care, and participate in sports and leisure activities, among others. At this point in the 21st century, in most countries where survivors live, it is still not possible for a person in a wheelchair to use public transport. Then how can that person travel to school or work? We see boys and girls who are not allowed to go to

school or people who are denied employment because of their disability. Survivors, often living far from urban centers, must also have all these rights realized.

The ICBL has issued a completion challenge to States Parties – to fulfill their Mine Ban Treaty obligations in the next decade. In the next 10 years, or sooner, the types of barriers I have described should be removed so that we gain full, legally protected access to the services and programs we need. Now and for the life of all survivors, our voices must be a part of any discussion on development or disability plans that will affect our well-being. This is what completion could mean for victim assistance. Ultimately, taking a rights-based approach, it should mean the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all survivors, without discrimination.

Victim assistance has promoted and must continue to promote the rights of survivors and to ensure access to existing services for all in need. This is the best way of lifting survivors, their families, and other persons with disabilities out of extreme poverty and into the center of their communities. We will continue advocating and monitoring to see that it gets done.

My colleagues from the Landmine Monitor have assessed the situation in all states with significant numbers of survivors since 1999, the first Maputo meeting 15 years ago. Their reports identify some main challenges and recommend pragmatic actions that can be taken immediately to improve the lives of survivors. They are available outside this room in English, French and Spanish. I invite you to take a copy; we welcome the opportunity to discuss these challenges and actions with you.

Thank you.