

Joint statement of the Co-Chairs for Victim Assistance, Austria and Costa Rica

J.D

Part I

Thank you, Mr. President.

Costa Rica and Austria have been honoured to serve as Co-Chairs for Victim Assistance together since the 13 MSP. In this capacity we may in the following offer a few remarks on the state of implementation of the victim assistance provisions of the Convention and our own efforts as Co-Chairs.

The Review Conference offers a timely opportunity to recall that the end of suffering of people from the horrific effects of anti-personnel mines is at the heart of the Mine Ban Treaty, which has been detrimental for the assistance to survivors, affected families and communities as well as for paving the way for the development of a norm for victim assistance, which is particularly important with view of the thousands of mine victims that live in countries not yet party to the Convention, and that has more broadly positively impacted on strengthening the rights of victims of weapons more broadly.

28 of the States Parties to the Mine Ban Treaty have taken over specific responsibilities for the assistance to victims, assisted by all states parties with their obligation to provide assistance for the care and rehabilitation, and social and economic reintegration, of mine victims.

The Mine Ban Treaty has also played a positive role for the development of the victim assistance provisions in the Convention on Cluster Munitions and the Convention of Certain Conventional Weapons Protocol V as well as for bringing about the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Together, these instruments can play a powerful role in assisting States to ensure to persons with disabilities including survivors as well as families and Communities affected by mines and ERW that their rights are being met.

In this vein, the Co-Chairs have been engaging in discussions in preparation of the Review Conference with the aim to ensure that the twin-track approach of victim assistance and the broader disability and development frameworks is followed in a coherent way as part of the long-term effort to integrate VA into these frameworks.

In the margins of the 13 MSP, Austria and Costa Rica conducted an informal meeting on the future challenges of victim assistance with all interested stakeholders and presented the outcome as a food for thought to the First Preparatory Committee for this review conference.

We would here like to pick out some particular thematic challenges that were identified: more attention to be given to the assistance to family members of persons injured or killed by anti-personnel mines; strengthening of the involvement of survivors and their representative organisations at all stages of decision-making as experts, outreach to remote and rural areas linked to continued need at community level to identify victims as a first step of assistance and the removing of barriers for the physical access, access to services, transport, communication technologies and attitudinal barriers in a society.

Here, I also have the pleasure to report that Austria in cooperation with the NGOS Platform “Zero Project” conducted two side events during the HRC sessions of 2013 and 2014 that engaged experts from various sectors, including experts working the Mine Ban context, in the spirit of building bridges to look into the challenges of implementing the CRPD and other international legal instruments of particular relevance of the rights of persons with disabilities from a coherent approach. Today we will organise a third side event together entitled "removing barriers to accessibility - a key component of a rights-based approach to victim assistance and disability", and we hope that many delegations will participate.

Austria represented the Co-Chairs at a regional conference hosted by the ICRC and the African Union Commission in Addis Abeba in March 2014 to advance the implementation of victim assistance obligations of various international and regional treaties in Africa. The conference in our view was very timely for strengthening a coordinated approach to maximise the benefits that African states can achieve for their people as States Parties to the Mine Ban Convention, the Convention on Cluster Munitions, the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and the CRPD. It demonstrated that regional and sub-regional cooperation can be a powerful tool to for strengthening the exchange of good practices and lessons learnt, for example with regard to the integration of victim assistance in broader development and disability plans, the effective coordination among the relevant national institutions involved in this complex issue or the use of synergies in the reporting under the various treaties.

With your permission, Mr. President, I would now directly hand over to my fellow Co-Chair Norman from Costa Rica to deliver the second part of our joint statement.