REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON VICTIM ASSISTANCE OF THE ANTI-PERSONNEL MINE BAN CONVENTION

Tuesday, 26 November
17MSP, Agenda item: 9.a

AMBASSADOR Geert Muylle OF BELGIUM, CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE ON VICTIM ASSISTANCE:

Excellencies, Dear colleagues,

1. My country had the honour to chair the Committee on Victim Assistance this year, alongside fellow Committee-members – Croatia, Mozambique and Ecuador – whom I warmly thank for their active collaboration. Throughout the year, we have come to take the full measure of the plight of mine victims and appreciate, at its true value, the remarkable engagement of volunteers, government officials and non-governmental organisations, who work tirelessly in the field, in capitals, and here in Geneva to support mine victims and their communities to the best of their abilities. Victim Assistance is a family, and it has been a privilege to be an active part of that family.

2. Before I report on the work of the Committee, let me extend my appreciation to the ISU for their relentless support to the Committee, and to our observer members, the ICBL and the ICRC, for their valuable contribution to our work.

Dear colleagues,

3. In line with our mandate and following the workplan outlined at the “ Victim Assistance Retreat” we organised earlier this year, the Committee focused its activities around the following five core priorities:

   a. Increase the quality and quantity of reporting by State Parties;
   b. Strengthen the synergies with key health, human rights and disability partners;
   d. Increase the opportunities for exchanges and the sharing of best practices with National Victim Assistance Experts;
   e. Increase attention to gender and the SDGs;

4. To raise awareness in relevant fora on the importance of victim assistance and its integration in broader policies and programmes, the Committee met this year with representatives of health, human rights and disability organizations, and participated in events relevant for its work.

   a. The Committee addressed the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, on three occasions to strengthen links between both Committees. We also encouraged the CRPD Committee to adopt a General Comment on Art. 11 of the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, which deals with the protection of persons with disabilities in situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies.

   b. The Committee also had the opportunity to collaborate with the WHO. We met with the WHO’s Coordinator and Adviser on Disability and Rehabilitation to explore strategic cooperation on assistive technology and inclusive development, and we addressed the World Health Assembly in May to support the adoption of a Resolution on Improving Access to Assistive Technology. We highlighted the importance of this initiative in providing support to mine victims.
5. To increase coherence between office-holders of relevant disarmament Conventions (APMBC, CCM, and Prot. V CCW) in the area of victim assistance, the Chair, on behalf of the Committee, organised a “Victim Assistance Retreat” in February 2018 where all agreed to reinforce our cooperation. In June, the Committee participated in a panel, organised by Italy, for the release of new “Operational Guidance for Victim Assistance, Responsive to Gender and Other Diversity Aspects” in the framework of the CCM, and addressed the victim assistance segment of the Meeting of Experts of Protocol V of the CCW. The Committee commends the participation of the CCM victim assistance coordinators to the intersessional meetings of the APMBC in June. The Committee also commends the adoption by the Conference of High Contracting Parties to Protocol V of the CCW, under the chairmanship of Iraq, of conclusions and recommendations in the area of victim assistance, where the Conference decided, I quote: “to give particular focus to exchanges of practical experience and lessons learned with other relevant legal instruments and fora”. We positively welcome this call for reinforced cooperation between our Conventions.

6. Following a request by affected State Parties, and mindful to reinforce the Committee’s effective support to States with a great number of mine victims, the Committee has organised a two-day “Victim Assistance Experts Meeting” this year that will run in parallel to our plenary meeting. This Meeting will be launched tomorrow in room 22. The Experts Meeting has been designed as an interactive forum where experts from affected State parties will have the opportunity to exchange best practices, reflect on their common challenges and needs, and attend practical workshops with a view to strengthening the implementation of their victim assistance commitments under the Convention. This year, the practical workshops will focus on action item 15 of the Maputo Action Plan which deals with strengthening local capacities, enhancing coordination, increasing access to rehabilitation services and socio-economic inclusion of victims. This workshop will be organized in cooperation with the WHO that will run a session on improving access to assistive technology, as well as with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the CRPD Secretariat and the International Development Association, that will inform States on the development of indicators for Disability and the SDGs. The Experts Meeting will also represent a unique opportunity for affected States to share their views and give input in preparation of the 4th Review Conference and the Global Conference on Victim Assistance next year.

7. In our efforts to increase reporting on victim assistance implementation, the Committee continuously engaged with State Parties, through written communication and briefings, encouraging the 29 States with a significant number of mine victims, to report, in particular, on progress and challenges.

8. We are grateful for the information provided by States. We are also grateful to the States that provided updates and clarifications on the observations compiled by the Committee which fed the conclusions for this 17th Meeting of State Parties.

9. Of the 29 State Parties that have reported significant numbers of mine victims in areas under their jurisdiction or control, 24 have submitted updated information on victim assistance activities. This figure includes 2 additional reports from Mozambique and Peru that were unfortunately received past out cut-off date and could not yet be integrated. It also includes additional information on victim assistance provided by Iraq following our observations. We acknowledge their efforts in sharing their reports with the Committee.

10. With 24 out of 29 States reporting this year, we are only 5 States away from fulfilling our objective of a 100% reporting rate on victim assistance. We encourage those 5 non-reporting States to seriously consider providing information on their implementation of actions #12 to #18 of the Maputo Action Plan next year.

11. From the information we did receive, the Committee observed that many challenges continue to affect victim assistance policies and programmes, as well as the integration of victim assistance into broader frameworks. Some of these key challenges are:
a. The reported continued increase in the number of casualties and the high number of non-surviving victims, which demonstrates the critical need for emergency medical care, including first aid and other pre-hospital assistance in areas contaminated by landmines;

b. The issue of data collection as a whole, and the disaggregation of data in particular, which remains difficult for States;

c. The lack of availability and/or accessibility to health and rehabilitation services, particularly in remote and rural areas;

d. The lack of resources and funding for victim assistance remains a major hindrance for the majority of State Parties in the implementation of their victim assistance commitments. In this regard, the Committee concluded that States in need of assistance should consider participating in the Convention’s “individualised approach” led by the Committee on the enhancement of Cooperation and Assistance next year.

12. Finally, Madam President, reflecting on its work this year, the Committee on Victim Assistance has concluded that the continued engagement of relevant health, human rights, disability and development actors to address the needs of victims in an efficient, effective, and sustainable fashion is and will remain critical. So is the reinforced cooperation between disarmament instruments with victim assistance responsibilities to ensure that all understand their specific role, highlight mutually beneficial opportunities, and ensure that activities are mutually reinforcing.

I have been a bit long Madam Chair, but I thought that this time and on this important subject it was necessary to give colleagues a comprehensive overview.

[THE PRESIDENT OF THE CONVENTION WILL OPEN THE FLOOR TO THE DELEGATIONS AND THEN GIVE THE FLOOR BACK TO THE COMMITTEE FOR CLOSING REMARKS]

13. Thank you very much Madam Chair for offering the floor back to the Committee to close our session.

14. I would like to thank all States and organisations that took the floor today and those that didn’t but do take an important part in our common struggle for victim assistance. The committee commends what they have accomplished so far and encourages them to step up their engagement to address the challenges we still face in victim assistance. As mentioned in many statements today, we have a lot of work ahead to adequately meet the needs and rights of all mine victims and to fully live up to our commitments under the convention.

15. I would also like to express again the Committee’s deep appreciation to the States that have reported on their victim assistance commitments this year, to the members of the Committee - Ecuador, Croatia and Mozambique -, to the ISU, ICRC, and ICBL for their work and dedication, and finally to the victim assistance coordinators of the CCM and Protocol V of the CCW, to the Committee on Cooperation and Assistance of the APMBC, to the Coordinators on Cooperation and Assistance of the CCM, to the CRPD/OHCHR, the IDA, and lastly to the WHO, for actively working with the Committee to promote the needs and rights of mine victims. This has been a team’s work and we are grateful to all for their support.

16. Let us all work for victim assistance to remain at the heart of the Convention as a core engagement of all State Parties but also as one of our highest priorities in mine action. I urge all State Parties to step up their efforts on victim assistance ahead of the Fourth Review Conference next year.

Madam President,

17. Belgium hereby concludes its role as Chair of the Committee on Victim Assistance. I’m very happy to hand over the chairmanship to my dear colleague from Mozambique, whom I invite to close our session.

[AMB. AMADEU PAULO SAMUEL DA CONCEIÇÃO OR JAIME CHISSANO TAKES THE FLOOR]