

ICBL Statement on Victim Assistance
Mine Ban Treaty Intersessional Standing Committee Meetings
Geneva, Switzerland
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Thank you Madam Co-Chair.

My name is Mamady Gassama and I live in Casamance, the most mine-affected region of Senegal. I am a co-founder of the Senegalese Association of Mine Victims and a researcher for the Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor. My organization participates in the ICBL's Survivor Network Project.

Since I was injured by a landmine in 1998, I have realized that our society imposes many barriers on persons with disabilities. Public and private buildings are inaccessible, public transportation is inaccessible, and this creates an endless need for assistance and accompaniment. Those barriers, which are often not imposed intentionally, are what creates disability. We are disabled when our physical environment, as well as communication and attitudinal barriers do not allow us to achieve the greatest personal autonomy.

In the Cartagena Action Plan, states committed to increase accessibility to services, including in rural and remote areas. They also committed to develop, share and apply standards, guidelines and good practices on accessibility. We are holding states' to their commitments to act and emphasize that access to services is needed in all places where survivors live.

Access means that everyone can enter buildings including government buildings, reach healthcare providers, use transportation, go to school and to places of worship, participate in the workplace, get relevant information and use all means of communication. Let me share a few examples of measures taken recently in various states to improve physical access to services. These may be adaptable to other countries. They show that improving access is doable, even in low-income countries or in post-conflict settings. You will find more details in the Monitor paper distributed in this room.

At the community level, recognizing the barriers that persons with disabilities face is often a first step to removing them. For example, in **Afghanistan**, NGOs are building ramps for access to public services and solutions to barriers to access are discussed with the community by survivors themselves. Once ramps are installed, there is increased the demand from the community for other accessible structures. The next step is national ownership: to have such activities integrated by the relevant ministries, which means policies must ensure that physical accessibility is taken into consideration from the get-go, meaning from the planning phase of all public infrastructures.

Improving physical access requires that the necessary regulations, policies and standards are in place and followed. For example, in **Uganda**, building standards have been developed and they include a monitoring mechanism. Some progress has already happened in the capital Kampala, but the standards must be made official to be enforceable. In **Serbia**, national funding for improving accessibility to services was made available. However local authorities still need to apply for and use it; this is a clear next step for Serbia.

Significant improvement of access requires coordination between government and NGOs, and it requires collaboration among ministries, services providers and survivors. For example, in a pilot project in **Peru**, such coordination lead to the creation of mobile teams made up of medical

professionals, educators, psychologists, social workers and rehabilitation technicians. They travel to remote mine-affected areas, visit persons with disabilities including landmine survivors in their homes, assess the obstacles they face, and provide responses as needed. The next step is to make the pilot project a sustainable solution in the long term, because most of the services remain centralized in Lima, while most landmine survivors live in remote areas.

Other states have surely improved accessibility recently, including through the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities where applicable. That information should also be made known. Please share your activities so far, and what next steps you propose to remove physical barriers in your country.

For those states that have not yet made progress, please start now and apply good practices, adapt these examples and come to the next meeting ready to announce steps taken to transform old barriers into new opportunities for survivors.

In conclusion I would like to pay tribute to André Tabaro, an ICBL campaigner who recently passed away. A political scientist and associate high school teacher, André worked actively in public administration in DR Congo until a landmine explosion almost cost him his life in 1996. He founded the National Association of Landmine Survivors and Defense of Victims' Rights, and brought an instrumental contribution to mine action in DR Congo. His work will remain an inspiration for us all.

Thank you.