

Meeting of CCW- P V – Victim Assistance session

24 April 2009

Ladies and gentlemen,

Providing assistance to survivors is not a complex issue, it is all about people's livelihoods, physical and social empowerment. The decade of activities and reflections by civil society and governments on victim assistance has acted as a huge investment in the field of victim assistance. This investment of time and energy has taught us many valuable lessons for the future and paved the way for further efficient and effective assistance to the survivors and people with disabilities.

In my six years of field experience in Afghanistan, I witnessed how the lives of a survivor or a person with disability can be drastically and efficiently changed *if* some proper assistance is provided in the right times. From my own experience as a survivor Access to medical care rescued my life, having access to physical rehabilitation services enabled me to stand and walk again and indeed opportunity to get a job gave me confidence, dignity and prestige as other people in society. Thanks to ICRC and Handicap International for their vital supports.

The proper assistance means based on the needs of the person, adapted to the needs of the person, appropriate to the context of the living environment of the person, long term and sustainable and indeed based on the human and civil rights of the survivor.

Assistance at the right times means from very beginning of the accident until full inclusion of the person in to society and up to regaining of a normal life. As the young survivor Soraj Ghulam Habib from Afghanistan said *"Today I am 17 years old. I do not want to wait years until I am an old man to receive assistance in my community or to be able to get a job. People who are injured should be able to receive emergency assistance and not be left to die in a hospital like I was until my father saved me"*.

It is great to see the "plan of action on victim assistance under protocol V" adopted and ready. In Afghanistan, we found having a national disability plan of action very useful. The disability stakeholders are no longer confused about how to provide assistance for survivors because the action plan covers all the areas of assistance to people with disabilities and survivors. So now they know what to do and what are the priorities. And the plan is likely to be effective because it was developed with the participation of survivors and people with disabilities and because the plan was developed based on day to day and long term needs. But the implementation of this plan requires real commitments and adequate resources to be achieved as expected.

As you now also move to implement the Protocol V action plan on victim assistance and to develop and implement national action plans on victim assistance, I would like to urge you to follow these ten core principles developed by the Victim Assistance Working Group of the ICBL, including experts and survivors from different parts of world.

1. **Inclusion:** As I described in the case of Afghanistan, survivors should be included in all decision-making processes that affect them; including the planning, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of projects and programs.
2. **Human rights perspective:** Victim assistance is a human rights issue based on the right of all people to an equal opportunity to participate in society through political, economic, social and cultural activities.
3. **Non-discrimination:** Victim assistance programs and projects should not discriminate on the basis of any characteristic, including the origin of the injury or the person's civilian or military status.
4. **Gender and age considerations:** Development of services for victims should take into account the gender and age of the victims, and particular efforts should be made to ensure access to and availability of services to all. The provision of services should be proportionate to the gender and age balance.
5. **Two-track approach:** While victims' rights and requirements should be ensured through programs for the general public as much as possible, special services should be provided where needed to ensure access to these services. Victim assistance should be integrated into disability program and project design; likewise, disability program and project design should be integrated into larger poverty reduction strategies and development programs and projects.
6. **Accessibility:** Victim assistance services should be made accessible to all people with disabilities. And the accessibility includes *Physical accessibility, Economic accessibility and Access to information.*
7. **Comprehensiveness and integrated nature of services:** Victim assistance should be provided through an integrated approach that includes all of the components of victim assistance, which are interrelated and all essential to the success of each component.
8. **Capacity building, sustainability and ownership:** Victim assistance needs to be conceived as a long-term activity since it will need to be undertaken through the lifetime of all current and future survivors and people with disabilities. Victim assistance programs should therefore emphasize from the beginning the training, recruitment and retention of local workers to be responsible for all aspects of victim assistance.
9. **Coordination of actors and stakeholders:** Planning and providing victim assistance should be coordinated among all stakeholders including the government, international agencies, civil society and the private sector, and at all levels.
10. **Individual and tailored approach:** Victim assistance should be tailored to the requirements of each specific person and the affected community, and appropriate for the country's specific situation.

These principles can help the national decision-makers to develop and implement the most concrete plans that will really make a difference in the lives of survivors. We are counting on you to live up to the promise of Article 8.2 of Protocol V and the Victim Assistance Plan of Action.

Thank you,

Firoz Ali Alizada - ICBL

firoz@icbl.org