Brief on Victim Assistance

Thank you very much Mr. President.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

This afternoon Caroline Woergoetter and I will report back on the key issues raised during this year’s session on victim assistance at the Meeting of Experts. Specifically I am going to focus on the main thematic topic of this year’s discussions, which was the social and economic reintegration of victims. Also, I will speak on national reporting under the new reporting template on victim assistance that was introduced for the first time this year. Caroline is going to speak on cooperation with other fora, the crucial issue of implementation and the focus of next year’s recommendations.

Social and economic reintegration

As already stated, the Sixth Conference decided to focus on social and economic reintegration of victims of ERW. Providing for the social and economic reintegration of victims is specifically referred to in Article 8 of Protocol V and the Plan of Action on Victim Assistance. To facilitate these discussions, I was delighted to be joined by a panel of experts from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, International Labour Organisation and International Committee of the Red Cross. The OHCHR clearly explained how Protocol V’s obligations on victim assistance are supported and reinforced by different human rights treaties such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The ILO provided examples of the different legal instruments and practical programmes that supported persons with disabilities to, for example, seek employment. The ILO had found that often the skills persons with disabilities learned or the courses available to them were not related to the job opportunities available in their local communities. Finally, the ICRC spoke about its experiences in the area of social and economic reintegration and lessons learnt.

I would especially like to thank those States that spoke about their efforts and were upfront in admitting their shortcomings in this area. The social and economic reintegration of victims was acknowledged by States as being a particular challenge. Reflecting the experience of the ILO, while States provided training opportunities and equipment, this all too often did not actually lead to employment or the establishment of successful businesses for victims.

Given that the social and economic reintegration is such a challenging area, I would strongly encourage States to continue to share their experiences in this area. Lessons learnt and successful examples have real potential to assist other States and this in turn underscores the importance of our continuing to address victim assistance.

[Possible speaker on social and economic reintegration]
National reporting

Last year the Sixth Conference agreed to a new reporting form on victim assistance. That reporting form is now a key part of the architecture supporting victim assistance under Protocol V. Other elements include Article 8 and the Plan of Action on Victim Assistance. I would like to thank the President for writing to all delegations at the beginning of this year to bring to their attention the new reporting form. I also followed up with affected States. And a special thanks to those High Contracting Parties that completed the reporting form on victim assistance. This work will enable us to assess the progress States are making to assist the victims of ERW, build up a body of best practices and better understand where affected States are facing difficulties.

I now have the pleasure of handing over to my colleague Caroline Woergoetter.

Cooperation with other fora

As delegations will recall last year the Sixth Conference agreed to exchange experiences on victim assistance with other relevant legal instruments. The importance of this recommendation was practically demonstrated by affected States during this year's Meeting of Experts. In this regard, I would like to express my appreciation to Albania, Chile, Colombia, Croatia and Uganda for sharing with us their experiences under the Convention on Anti-personnel Landmines, Convention on Cluster Munitions and Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. An important point raised during the discussions was that the development of national laws, policies and programmes on victim assistance was greatly assisted when there were synergies between the different legal instruments.

A view that has been expressed is that now the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is in place there may no longer be a need for considering victim assistance under the different conventional weapons treaties. However, assisting the victims ERW is a commitment that all High Contracting Parties have undertaken by joining Protocol V. Irrespective of the CRPD, the obligation under Protocol V must be respected. As explained by the OHCHR, Protocol V and CRPD reinforce and support each other, but it is not the case that one replaces the other. Finally, a practical matter is that not all Protocol V High Contracting Parties are party to the CRPD.

Making a difference to the lives of victims is a major challenge and understanding what is happening in other fora and learning from their experiences can only enhance our own efforts under Protocol V. It is for these reasons that we have again proposed that next year there continue to be a focus on sharing experiences with other relevant legal instruments.

Focus on implementation
In the margins of this year’s Meeting of Exerts, Fernando and myself held a small group meeting of interested delegation on how to advance implementation of the victim assistance obligations under Protocol V. We have also proposed that next year instead of taking up another thematic discussion that we focus on implementation. Such work could involve assessing exactly what affected and donor States have achieved under Protocol V and in particular the Plan of Action on Victim Assistance, considering the challenges that affected States face in their efforts to assist victims and what can be done to overcome these problems. Again much can be learnt from other fora and the different approaches to measuring the progress made and what has been done to articulate the obligations on victim assistance to States and the wider international community.

I would now like to hand back the floor to my colleague, Fernando.

[Fernando] Thank you very much Caroline. I now open the floor to interventions, comments and questions.

[The floor to be given to those requesting to speak.]

Would any other delegation wish to take the floor? This does not seem to be the case, I would now like to hand back the floor to the President.