

Cluster Munition Coalition Statement on Victim Assistance  
Convention on Cluster Munitions Third Meeting of States Parties



Oslo, 12 September 2012

Thank you Mr. President.

My name is Thoummy Silamphan. I come from Lao PDR. Every year more people become victims of cluster munitions. The vast majority are civilians. And, far too often they are children, like I was when I was injured in 1996. I was 8 years old.

Victim assistance is a legal duty. There are clear steps States Parties must take to improve the quality of our lives and to ensure our rights are protected. Victim Assistance is doable. And the Vientiane Action Plan guides states on how to make the convention work as quickly as possible.

The Convention has a lot of potential, and survivors put trust in its promises. Some changes will take time. But states have to start the work right away. Some are doing so, and we can see already the difference between efforts of States Parties and signatories in providing victim assistance, compared to other countries.

For example, most States Parties are doing more to understand the situation in which victims live, by surveying victims and planning to meet their needs. Almost all States Parties also have named a focal point for victim assistance. And most involve victims in planning and in providing relevant services. Just like me. I am involved in my country, the Lao PDR. The government

invites me to meetings as a Ban Advocate and as Executive Director of the Quality of Life Association, a non-profit organization in Xiengkhouang Province, where many survivors live. We pay for medical treatment and transportation after an accident. We provide psychological support too. I know many young survivors who don't want to go on with their life after an accident. We help them to overcome their trauma and go on with their studies and we help them to find a job.

If you want to know more about the situation about efforts on the Convention on Cluster Munitions in my country or others, please pick up a copy of the *Cluster Munition Monitor* outside to read much more about progress being made. I would now like to focus on a few areas that are most important to me and other survivors.

We, cluster munition survivors need to be able to work to support ourselves and our families, like everyone else. But unlike others, we face specific challenges because of our injuries. So our call is to make sure we can have the same opportunities as others, which is also required under this Convention.

We need good quality medical care and physical rehabilitation. Right now, it is mostly NGOs and international organizations that provide such services. And it is often difficult to access them in remote and rural areas. I know someone who was injured in the nineteen-seventies when she was sixteen. She finally received a prosthesis a few years ago. Also, many of us still

need psychological support to help us heal from trauma. We, young survivors, need education and job training; more programs are needed to help us find a way to earn a living.

Yet we see that the least progress has been in psychological support and ensuring economic inclusion. These services are mainly given by NGOs. To create national ownership and make these services sustainable, peer- to-peer groups and survivor networks need more support by states. I already spoke about the survivor network I started this year in my province. We have international support and we are encouraged by the national government. National support is necessary to make projects sustainable.

If we all lived in big cities, it might be easier to get the support we need. But many cluster munition victims don't live in big cities. We live in small villages, sometimes far from cities and far from each other. So we need more services where we live. Or, we need support to get to the services, where they are. This means we need to be informed they are available. We need transportation we can afford. And we need ongoing support to ensure they help us in the long run. The Vientiane Action Plan calls for all of this.

Victim assistance is mainly a question of ensuring we have access to adequate services, which is our right. Sometimes we see progress on laws and regulations, but we do not see the difference in our lives. For example, some survivors have the right to free medical care, but they cannot get it in reality. Some states have quotas for the employment of persons with disabilities, but then do not respect them. No States Parties have done enough to enforce regulations requiring

physical accessibility for persons with disabilities. And sometimes policies still allow for different treatment for different kinds of victims. Or put other barriers in our way of getting support.

Finally, a sharp fall in funding for victim assistance was a real problem last year. Most affected States Parties still need a lot of international assistance for victim assistance services. And all States Parties have committed to helping one another under the Convention. But services in some states were cut back because international funding dropped. We call on the affected states themselves to take more responsibility and to provide more resources for victim assistance programs when possible, as it is first and foremost their duty to provide support for cluster munition victims. We urge to report on national resources allocated to Victim Assistance as well as on their needs and we call on all states to stay true to their commitment to help, even in times of cutting budgets not to cut in victim assistance projects and even increase their support. Finally, we reiterate again and again our call on all affected states to include survivors in victim assistance from planning to implementation and monitoring.

In closing, I would like to say that the Convention on Cluster Munitions has the power to improve the lives of the victims, their families and communities. We believe in this promise. We can already see some changes. We, survivors, count on you to keep making it happen. Thank you.