
Mine Action and effective coordination: the United Nations policy

*Sectoral policy: The scope of action of mine action centres
and organizations in victim assistance*



**United Nations Mine Action Service
May 2003**

This statement of United Nations policy is a sub component of "Mine action and effective coordination: the United Nations Policy" (A/56/448/Add2 dated Sep 1998)

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I. Introduction

1. The human and social impact of landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO)¹ continues to be a major source of humanitarian concern worldwide. Landmines maim and kill thousands of innocent people every year and hold entire communities hostage. They prevent food and medical aid from reaching people in need, render agricultural land useless, hinder the return of displaced families to their communities, and hamper already difficult relief operations and reconstruction efforts in many affected countries.
2. Thanks to the commitment, time and energy of many individuals, organizations, and governments, awareness of the problem has grown steadily during the past few years, contributing to reducing the numbers of new victims in many countries, even though the number of victims worldwide continues to increase. All victims will require supports and services for many years to come and much remains to be done to fully meet their needs. Most landmine survivors need much more than surgery and prosthetics. They need a lifetime of support to resume a productive role as part of their communities.
3. The United Nations, in Article 1 of its Charter, promotes and encourages the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all. In recognition of the central place of victims in the fight against landmines, the United Nations policy identifies victim assistance as one of the five core components of mine action. Victim assistance is also an obligation of States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Antipersonnel Mines and on Their Destruction² under its Article 6.

II. Objectives

4. The UN system wishes to improve its contributions to an effective and coordinated response to the needs of landmine victims and to a more systematic and concerted approach to services. Building upon recent experiences and internationally accepted principles, it seeks to maximise the use of its resources and to support the development, promotion and delivery of improved services for landmine survivors and, more generally, landmine victims.
5. This policy is intended to provide direction to UN mine action programmes and centres and to provide a framework and guidance for all other mine action organizations and authorities who engage in mine action field operations. More specifically, it aims to:
 - (a) define the principles upon which UN victim assistance activities should be based;
 - (b) articulate the role of mine action centres³ in the area of victim assistance;

¹ Throughout the rest of this document, the term “landmines” will be used in reference to both landmines and UXO.

² Also known as the Ottawa Convention or the Antipersonnel Mine Ban Convention.

³ Mine action centre refers to those organizations given the authority to plan and coordinate mine action activities in-country.

- (c) clarify the responsibilities and roles of UN departments and agencies in the area of victim assistance;
- (d) identify the requirements and opportunities for resource mobilization.

III. Context

6. Principles and guidelines for victim assistance have already been established by a number of concerned organisations. They include:

- (a) The UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities⁴;
- (b) “A collection of guidelines, best practices and methodologies” published and distributed by the Co-chairs of the Standing Committee on Victim Assistance and Socio-economic Integration of the AP Mine Ban Convention⁵ in May 2001;
- (c) The Joint ICRC-WHO Strategy for the Prevention, Care and Rehabilitation of Victims of Landmines⁶, the Maputo strategy framework⁷, and the Bad Honnef Framework⁸.

7. The UN is committed to working in accordance with these statements and in close collaboration with like-minded organisations that promote support to all persons with disabilities.

IV. The nature of victim assistance:

8. The definitions used in this policy are largely drawn from those already developed and agreed upon in the context of the Standing Committee on victim assistance.

9. The term *Landmine Survivor* refers to any individual who has been directly injured by a landmine explosion and has survived the accident. *Landmine Victims* refer more generally to those who have been injured or killed by a landmine explosion, and also their families who suffer emotional, social and financial loss and the communities that lose access to land and other resources due to the presence of landmines. This more general definition is intended to recognize that the needs of those affected by the presence of landmines should drive all mine action efforts.

10. In the context of this policy, *victim assistance* refers to all care and rehabilitation activities that aim to meet the immediate and long-term needs of landmine survivors, their families, and mine-affected communities. In accordance with the definition developed by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), the activities and concerns involved can be divided into nine categories as follows: Emergency medical care; Continuing medical care; Physical rehabilitation, prostheses and assistive devices; Psychological and social support; Employment and economic integration; Capacity-building and sustainability; Legislation and public awareness; Access; and, Data collection.

V. Guiding principles for victim assistance

⁴ General Assembly Resolution 48/96, of 4 March 1994.

⁵ Referred to as “Standing Committee on victim assistance” in the rest of this document. (www.gichd.ch)

⁶ WHO, 1997 (www.who.org)

⁷ Guidelines adopted by the 4th International Conference of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), held in Maputo, Mozambique, 1997 (www.mines.gc.ca)

⁸ A framework for mine action programmes, from a development-oriented point of view, developed by the German Campaign to Ban Landmines and subsequently revised in 1997. (www.landmine.de)

A. A comprehensive and integrated approach

11. Victim assistance is not a stand-alone activity. Active efforts should be made to integrate victim assistance activities within the framework of national and local public health, community-development and violence-prevention strategies developed by national authorities and it should form part of broader humanitarian, reconstruction and development plans aimed to help countries recover from violent conflicts.

12. Responding to the needs of vulnerable populations affected by the presence of landmines requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the different facets of 'health' or 'well-being' at the physical, psychological and social levels. It also requires the development of services, which, as part of a coherent public health and social services system, are flexible and responsive enough to meet the specific needs of individuals and communities alike.

13. A proper national and/or local mechanism is required to effectively coordinate activities concerning landmine survivors and victims together with all other persons with disabilities. Such a mechanism should bring together all government and aid agencies concerned, including organizations of persons with all types of disability, service delivery organizations, and mine action centres and organizations where they exist. For the purposes of service planning and implementation, this mechanism should normally function under the auspices of an appropriate ministry or a national commission of the country concerned.

B. Participation, capacity building and sustainability

14. In order to be sustainable in the long term, assistance programmes must build on local people and structures, and empower local communities to contribute to the development of their health, social and economic infrastructures. Landmine survivors and victims, persons with disabilities, local communities and their leaders should be fully involved in the planning and implementation of victim assistance services. Their active participation is crucial to the success and effectiveness of such services.

C. Non-discrimination, neutrality, impartiality and humanity

15. Landmine survivors, victims and persons with disabilities have a right to shape their lives and to participate in decisions affecting the realization of their rights. Victim assistance is non discriminatory and is viewed as an integral part of assistance to all victims of violence, trauma and disability. Plans, policies and processes of development should include the mainstreaming of the norms and principles of international human rights standards and conventions.

16. Landmine survivors, victims and persons with disabilities have equal rights and are entitled to the same level of attention to their needs. While intense periods of conflict may require that special attention be paid to serving the war-injured, victim assistance programmes should be accessible to all persons with disabilities.

17. Respect of the fundamental principles of neutrality, impartiality and humanity is essential, so that priority for services and treatment is based on need, with no distinction being made based on the civilian or military status of landmine survivors.

D. Integration

18. Assistance to landmine survivors should aim to meet the most acute need identified by most landmine survivors, that is to return to their families and communities as social and economic contributors – not as long term dependents.

E. Training

19. Effective assessment of the needs of vulnerable populations including landmine survivors, victims and persons with disabilities requires the requisite skill and expertise.

20. Mine action personnel are often required to interact with vulnerable populations, including landmine survivors, victims and persons with disabilities. This interaction calls for the requisite sensitivity that can be provided through orientation training during initial set-up of a programme and through continuing education opportunities as a recurring capacity-building requirement. Such sensitivity training can be provided by organizations with expertise in the field of disability.

VI. Mine action centres and victim assistance

General

21. Mine action centres are not designed to take the lead role in victim assistance, nor do they have the mandate, expertise or required resources. Under the overall coordination of the national commission or responsible ministry, any mine action organization can, however, make significant contributions to the care, rehabilitation and integration of landmine survivors and victims, notably in the fields of: data collection and dissemination, advocacy, planning and coordination, community relations, and support to service delivery.

22. This section of the policy aims to clarify the diversity of roles that mine action centres and organizations may assume in victim assistance; it suggests a graduated approach to a range of supports that they may offer, based on local needs, capacities and resources. Activities may range from a minimum of support in a mature victim assistance service environment to maximum support in less developed victim assistance environments and whereby mine action may play a significant role. The role of a mine action centre with regard to victim assistance should be defined at the onset of the programme, and then reviewed regularly in consultation with the appropriate partners.

A. Data collection and dissemination

23. The collection of information on the numbers and general profiles of landmine survivors and victims, and on the local capacity for provision and coordination of victim assistance is essential in evaluating the need for assistance. Whenever possible, mine action assessment missions, deployed prior to the initiation of mine action programmes, should include a member with appropriate knowledge and experience to carry out this task.

24. Mine-related data collected and shared by mine action centres and organizations can significantly contribute to the delivery of victim assistance by humanitarian aid partners. Data relevant to victim assistance can include: the presence of hazards; environmental conditions; denial of access to community services, utilities and the means of economic livelihood; demographic and geographic information; and, landmine injury incidence rates and circumstances.

25. Cooperation in the areas of data collection, analysis and information exchange can improve decision-making and priority setting and ultimately improve the quality of service. Mine action centres and partner organisations involved in the delivery of victim assistance should cooperate on landmine survivor and victim related information priorities and management in support of national humanitarian and socio-economic objectives.

26. In many countries, adequate government or other organisational involvement in survivor and victim data management is not always available. While assisting to enhance local capacity and until alternative data management capacities are developed, the mine action centre should accept the responsibility for collecting data related to landmine survivors and victims in addition to that required to pursue its more narrow focus on mine risk education, survey, mapping and clearance activities and it could become the principal custodian of the national database of such information.

27. The timely notification and exchange of information on new mine accidents, between the mine action centres and partner organisations involved in victim assistance, is a vital component of planning and execution of priority activities in mine risk education, mine clearance operations and quality assurance procedures. Mine action centres should ensure that appropriate mechanisms and procedures are in place to collect these data and to rapidly respond to indications of increased incidence or drastic changes in trends.

28. In cooperation with government authorities and partner organizations involved in victim assistance, mine action centres should acquire and disseminate listings of available services and referral mechanisms in order to direct landmine survivors, victims and persons with disabilities, to the appropriate services.

B. Advocacy

29. An essential element to the advancement of fundamental rights is the inclusion of landmine survivors and victims into the broader sector of disability and the linkage of both sectors to international human rights frameworks. Mine action centres can instil the requisite knowledge of relevant national legislation and national and international guidelines and promote the rights of landmine survivors, victims and persons with disabilities by making use of experts in the field of disability in initial orientation training and recurring capacity building measures.

30. As active advocates for the development of national policies, legislation, and practices that promote employment opportunities for landmine survivors, victims and persons with disabilities, mine action centres and organizations should also serve as models of equitable employment. This can be achieved through a variety of measures such as hiring policies and practices that promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities according to their ability and skill, the rehabilitation of employees who have sustained employment-related injuries, vocational training, reserved or designated employment, flexible hours, part-time work, job-sharing, exclusive contracts or priority production rights. Landmine survivors should also be promoted as effective peer supports to other survivors. The concept of “peer support” applies particularly for those activities that involve interaction with persons with disabilities, impact survey and risk education.

C. Planning and coordination

31. Activities undertaken by mine action centres and organizations should be integrated and coordinated with other relief and development programmes, in particular with those providing assistance to all categories of disabled persons. Each mine action centre or organization should appoint a staff member as the focal point for victim assistance, actively participate in the relevant coordination mechanisms and periodically review the scope of its contributions to victim assistance.

32. The propagation of public health and safety messages and practices is key to the recovery of communities emerging from violent conflicts. In consultation with local partners, mine action centres and organizations should facilitate the integration of public health and safety messages and all relevant information needed by landmine survivors and victims, into community mine risk education materials and activities. Their partners, in turn, should be encouraged to integrate mine risk education and victim assistance messages in their community activities. Such messages should promote, *inter alia*, the de-stigmatisation of persons with disabilities.

D. Community relations

33. Mine action programmes are more successful when mine affected communities are involved in consultations and discussions concerning the presence of landmine and UXO hazards, the need for mine risk education and victim assistance, and setting priorities for survey, marking and clearance. Mine action

centres and organizations should develop community relations strategies based on relevant guidelines and best practices and ensure that their staff members are adequately trained in this area.

E. Supports to service delivery

34. In circumstances where, for example, no national or local coordination mechanism exists, and in consultation with national/local authorities and international/local health agencies, it is determined that a mine action centre or organization should temporarily assume responsibility for the coordination of delivery of victim assistance services, the centre will mobilise the appropriate expertise to develop the initial victim assistance plan in consultation with key stakeholders. The plan should include and clearly identify the critical and long-term needs of landmine survivors, victims and persons with disabilities and the required support for the development of a sustainable national capacity, as well as provisions for a transfer of management and coordination responsibilities to national/local authorities at the earliest opportunity. The mine action centre or organization may also participate in the mobilization and management of resources.

VII. Resources

35. Victim assistance relies on the commitment of resources by national governments, international organisations and private organisations. States Parties to the Antipersonnel Mine Ban Convention in a position to do so are bound to provide assistance for the care and rehabilitation, and social and economic reintegration of mine victims.

36. The United Nations promotes a comprehensive approach to mine action of which victim assistance is an integral part. Accordingly, mine action programmes should be encouraged to include their financial requirements related to victim assistance activities, in projects submitted to the international community for funding. Donors, in turn, are encouraged to consider comprehensive funding of mine action projects that include well-defined program needs for victim assistance. Whenever possible, resource mobilisation and allocation strategies for mine action should promote and endorse projects that demonstrate their roles and responsibilities in mine risk education, clearance activities and victim assistance, as a comprehensive approach to mine action.

VII. Responsibilities and coordination mechanisms

A. Roles and responsibilities of United Nations partners

United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS)

37. The United Nations Mine Action Service is the focal point within the UN system for all mine-related activities. It advocates for the development of assistance programmes where the needs of survivors and victims are addressed as part of a comprehensive response to the needs of persons with disabilities. It seeks to ensure that all efforts are made to mobilize the required resources and directly supports the initiation of such programmes in the context of peacekeeping operations and humanitarian emergencies.

World Health Organisations (WHO)

38. The World Health Organization's activities of relevance for victim assistance fall into two areas: injury surveillance, and pre-hospital care for injury. Within both of these areas, the WHO stresses an integrated and comprehensive approach, focusing on technical support, capacity building, and collaboration wherever possible with Ministries of Health in the Member State concerned. By focusing on these two priority areas the WHO is enhancing capacities which will be of benefit for all forms of injury, and not just those related to landmine or UXO injury. In this sense, these victim assistance activities clearly respect the principle of a non-discriminatory approach to victim assistance.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

39. UNICEF strives to ensure the survival, protection and development of children, and recognises that landmines and other explosive remnants of war directly and indirectly threaten children's rights to life, survival and development, including health care, education, care and nutrition, and safe water and sanitation. In mine-affected countries, UNICEF will support the development and implementation of a UN policy on the integration of survivor assistance into mine action programs and work with partners to ensure that children, their families and their communities know how to reduce mine risks. It will also advocate for and with them on mine issues. UNICEF will contribute to the identification and assessment of the needs of mine survivors, support the development of local and national strategies for assistance to survivors and contribute to the development of public and community health, disability and social reintegration strategies to recognize the rights of survivors and to render services accessible, particularly for children and women. As most mine casualties occur during or immediately post-conflict, in emergencies where national authorities do not exist or are unable to respond, UNICEF will act to identify at-risk populations in coordination with WHO, carry out emergency mine risk education, and support other risk reduction activities. At a global level, and based on its work in the field, UNICEF will promote best practices in mine risk education, advocate for universal ratification and implementation of the Mine Ban Treaty, including the provisions for international assistance to mine affected countries.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

40. Within its mandate⁹, UNDP will encourage national mine action authorities to undertake the responsibilities specified in Part VI of this policy statement and collaborate with other agencies to promote the rights of all disabled peoples. It will mobilise resources to enable the continuation and expansion of small scale, locally managed projects aimed at the economic re-integration of landmine survivors.

International Labour Organisation (ILO)

41. The ILO Focus Programme on Crisis Response and Reconstruction (IFP/Crisis) supports and assists national governments and agencies, local NGOs and organization of persons with disabilities in the planning and implementation of general demobilization and reintegration programmes, the promotion of national training policy, and the establishment of local and national associations of disabled ex-combatants, war veterans, landmine survivors, other persons with disabilities and victims of conflict.

United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)

42. UNOPS provides support in victim assistance to mine affected countries by providing international experts and consultants to mine action programmes under the auspices of UNMAS, UNDP and the United Nations Office of the Iraq programme (UNOIP), when the respective agency agrees to include such support. The international experts work with government ministries and/or local authorities responsible for health and social welfare to assist with the development of strategic plans and policies

⁹ To address the socio-economic consequences of landmine contamination and supporting national and local capacity building to eliminate the obstacle that landmines pose to the resumption of normal economic activity, reconstruction and development

with regard to victim assistance. In addition, UNOPS enters into contracts and grant agreements, on behalf of UNMAS, UNDP and UNOIP, with local institutions that provide a range of services, from emergency medical care to the socio-economic reintegration of landmine victims and persons with disabilities.

B. Contributions of like-minded partners

43. The United Nations welcomes and acknowledges all contributions to victim assistance made by like-minded partners from both governments and civil society. It recognizes in particular the instrumental role of the NGO community and multiple partners in raising public awareness of the landmine issue and addressing the needs of those at risk. In articulating and developing its mine action policy and activities, the United Nations strives to give due consideration to the concerns of all parties.

The International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL)

44. As part of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, representatives of over 40 non-governmental organizations have formed a Working Group on Victim Assistance (WGVA) to increase the level and quality of programmes designed to improve the situation of landmine victims and survivors worldwide. The group communicates mainly by e-mail and meets in conjunction with meetings of the States Parties to the AP Mine Ban Convention, the Standing Committees, and the ICBL. The WGVA advocates for, monitors and provides guidance to the international community as to where what and how victim assistance is needed; promotes increased coverage, funding, and sustainability of victim assistance programs; promotes improvements in the quality of programs for landmine victims and other persons with disability; facilitates inclusion of landmine victims in the substantive work of the Standing Committees, Meetings of States Parties, national and international campaigns to ban landmines.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

45. The International Committee of the Red Cross acts to help all victims of war and internal violence and endeavours to ensure implementation of humanitarian rules restricting armed violence. In dealing with the scourge of landmines, the ICRC has encouraged the international community to adopt a 'public health' approach comprising preventive, curative and rehabilitative measures. While these measures include as a key element humanitarian mine clearance, the ICRC's efforts have focused on advocacy, mine-awareness and risk-reduction education, and assistance to landmine victims (first aid, surgery, rehabilitation and socio-economic reintegration). The ICRC encourages efforts to promote better field cooperation and coordination in order to avoid duplication and waste of human and material resources. (9)

The Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD)

46. The Geneva Centre supports Humanitarian Mine Action through research, operational assistance and contributions to the implementation of the Mine Ban Treaty. It is an independent Foundation supported by 18 governments.

C. Funding mechanisms

47. Funding for victim assistance may be channelled through a variety of mechanisms and implementing partners. To facilitate the development of a comprehensive picture of victim assistance needs and of funding mechanisms, UNMAS, in cooperation with the ICBL Working Group on Victim Assistance, prepares an annual "Portfolio of Victim Assistance Projects." This electronic document presents an overview of each project soliciting funds and gives an overall perspective to prospective donors on the scope of the need for resources. It is available through the Electronic Mine Information Network, at: www.mineaction.org.

48. The Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action (VTF), managed by UNMAS, may be used to finance: a/. the development of guidelines and tools to better integrate victim assistance with other disability and mine-related activities; b/. the assessment of the needs of survivors and victims in countries severely affected by mines and UXOs; c/. the initiation of victim assistance projects in the context of emergency mine action programmes; and, d/. the bridging of funding delays in ongoing programmes.

49. The Trust Fund for Human Security (TFHS) receives funds donated by the Government of Japan and supports projects implemented by UN agencies that address various threats to human lives, livelihoods and dignity, from a human security perspective. It can be used to finance projects related to victim assistance.

50. The UN Fund for International Partnerships (UNFIP) supports the development of high-impact programmes and projects from UN organizations, and promotes new UN partnerships and alliances, including with companies and foundations, as well as bilateral and multilateral donors, in furtherance of the Millennium development goals.

51. The United Nations Voluntary Fund on Disability originally established for the 1981 International Year of Disabled Persons continues to provide seed money grants to small-scaled projects for persons with disabilities.

52. Adopt-A-Minefield®, a program of the United Nations Association of the USA, in partnership with Ted Turner's Better World Fund, is a global campaign that engages individuals, community groups, and businesses in the United Nations effort to resolve the landmine crisis. The Campaign helps to save lives and rebuild mine-affected communities by raising funds for mine clearance and survivor assistance, and by raising awareness of the landmine problem. The Survivor Assistance program seeks to support organizations that are making a positive impact in the lives of landmine accident survivors and are working in one of Adopt-A-Minefield's 6 program countries: Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Croatia, Mozambique and Vietnam.

Glossary of Terms

To ensure consistency with other UN Mine Action documents, most definitions have been taken from the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS 04.10, First Edition, 2001-10-01)

Accident

An undesired event, which results in **harm**.

Advocacy

In the context of mine action, the term refers to public support, recommendation or positive publicity with the aim of removing, or at least reducing the threat from, and the impact of, mines and UXO.

Anti-personnel mines (APM)

A mine designed to be exploded by the presence, proximity or contact of a person and that will incapacitate, injure or kill one or more persons.

Donor/funder

All sources of funding, including the government of mine affected states.

Explosive ordnance

All munitions containing explosives, nuclear fission or fusion materials and biological and chemical agents. This includes bombs and warheads; guided and ballistic missiles; artillery, mortar, rocket and small arms ammunition; all mines, torpedoes and depth charges; pyrotechnics; clusters and dispensers; cartridge and propellant actuated devices; electro-explosive devices; clandestine and improvised explosive devices; and all similar or related items or components explosive in nature.

Mine risk education (MRE)

A process that promotes the adoption of safer behaviours by at-risk groups, and which provides the links between affected communities, other mine action components and other sectors.

Mine Ban Treaty (MBT)

Also known as the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Antipersonnel Mines and on Their Destruction or the Ottawa Convention

Note: Provides for a complete ban on the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel mines (APMs) and on their destruction.

Mine clearance

The clearance of mines and UXO from a specified area to a predefined standard.

Landmine Survivor¹⁰

An individual who has been directly injured by a landmine explosion and has survived the accident.

Landmine Victim¹¹

An individual who has been injured or killed by a landmine explosion, and also his/her family who suffers emotional, social and financial loss and the communities that lose access to land and other resources due to the presence of landmines. This more general definition is intended to recognize that the needs of those affected by the presence of landmines should drive all mine action efforts.

Victim assistance¹²

The care and rehabilitation activities that aim to meet the immediate and long-term needs of landmine mine survivors, their families, and mine-affected communities.

¹⁰ ref. Parag. 9

¹¹ ref. Parag. 9

¹² ref. Parag. 10