

Statement by Lou McGrath at the 4th Review Conference of the Mine Ban Convention in Oslo.

Thank you Mr President for the opportunity to address the conference and thank you also for your visit and interest in the Sir Bobby Charlton Centre for Support and Rehabilitation in Amman, Jordan run by our partners, Asia Development Training.

At this conference we have heard agencies rightly calling for victim assistance to be a mainstream part of mine-action –which I had always believed that we had agreed it was- yet just as we are seeing this rise in victim numbers, donor funding for victim assistance is actually decreasing.

In response to the appalling number of innocent people we witnessed being killed and maimed by landmines in Afghanistan, northern Iraq, Cambodia and Angola, like many other individuals, I felt compelled to do something to stop the madness of such an appalling indiscriminate weapon. Meeting with so many others from around the world, with the same determination to do something is what bought some governments to back the International Campaign to Ban Landmines that then led to the creation of the Anti Personnel Mine Ban Convention in Ottawa in 1997 - for which all we campaigners from all the countries represented, received the Nobel Peace Prize, here in Oslo.

The AP Mine Ban Convention is often cited as the most successful weapons reduction treaty of all time – very soon after implementation victim numbers began to decrease until they reached an all time low in 2014. Sadly, since then, they began to rise again.

Now in 2019 I'm back in Oslo for this 4th Review Conference of the Mine Ban Convention and I feel my heart breaking at the reality that the number of victims now almost matches that from before the convention came into force.

While the global rise in numbers could be mainly down to the use of improvised anti personnel mines, laid by non-states parties such as ISIS and FARC. I recently visited Cambodia, that has a government who takes mine action seriously, determined to achieve the targets it has set. Yet I learn accidents in that country have already reached 70 people being maimed or killed in 2019.

Whatever the explosive weapon the impact on the victim is still the same. Blast results in a very complex suite of injuries which are life changing. Survivors thus need to have long term medical and more often than not, psychological support.

The Sir Bobby Charlton Foundation is leading the way in creating rehabilitation centres for victims of explosive violence, with one in Jordan and another currently being built in Cambodia. We want to see victims to get the long term support they need. We want to see them have the best quality of life they can – and as well as providing medical and psychological care, we want survivors to have appropriate vocational training to allow them the opportunities that we all share.

It is right and important that we hear the testimonies at meetings such as these, from a victim or survivor of an anti-personnel landmine accident. However, when you talk to those who are invited to give their story, and you realise that it's a flight, per diem,

breakfast and dinner and then back home to unemployment and an uncertain future all the stresses and strains that go with travelling without your family and that brief moment of fame and applause from all of us here, their life becomes a reality again. Its not new, its done time and time again, victims and survivors should not be a gimmick. They should be here representing their communities with dignity and respect and listened to and given serious thought and consideration of how each and every delegation, whether donor or affected country are going to seriously commit yourselves to your treaty obligations.

States need to see funding for victim assistance as not just humanitarian – but in unstable areas such as Syria and Iraq – as vital to re build the security and stability of the population.

Victim assistance will contribute to delivery of the sustainable development goals in many ways and therefore funding in this area becomes an investment in the future rather than just a donation.

I urge donor states to look carefully at their future funding priorities and to set aside enough money for the victim assistance agencies to deliver the best possible service to all those who become casualties from landmines and recognise that victims also include their families.