

Addressing gender-based violence in the context of assistance to victims of mines/ERW: recommendations for a way forward

Intervention by Wanda Muñoz from SEHLAC at the side event of the Gender and Diversity Working Group and Mission of Spain in Geneva; in the framework of the Intersessional Meetings of the Mine Ban Treaty, June 2021.

Greetings to everyone and thank you very much for allowing me to this intervention by video. Un saludo a todas y todos quienes nos escuchan, bonjour à tous et à toutes.

Today I would like to invite you to reflect on gender-based violence in the context of victim assistance. I will tell you why we need to act on this urgently, and then share some ideas of how to do so:

1. Firstly, most of the girls and women that survive a mine/ERW accident acquire a disability.
2. Secondly, we know that gender-based violence is still widespread worldwide and has worsened during the pandemic. Well, violence against women and girls with disabilities is even worse. The United Nations Population Fund UNFPA has documented that girls and women with disabilities face up to ten times more sexual violence than those without. Let that sink in: ten times more sexual violence; and it is even worse against women with disabilities living in poverty in humanitarian settings, or those with characteristics or identities that have been historically marginalized. Additionally, in a study by UNFPA and HI of which I was part in 2020, that I was part of, we found that not a single service that responds to gender-based violence is truly inclusive of, or accessible to, women and girls with disabilities.

3. The Oslo Action Plan specifically calls on countries in Action 33 to “use an approach that is inclusive of gender, age and disability, among other references to gender. The CRPD with which we aim to create synergies with has a specific obligation in Art 16.5 to implement measures to ensure that people with disabilities live a life free of violence, in and outside their homes; and recognizes the need for specific initiatives for on women.

But despite gender being an integral part of the Oslo Action Plan and of the CRPD, and of evidence that women with disabilities face much more violence than the rest of the population, we as victim assistance community have not yet systematically addressed the issue; this means we are falling short on our commitment to gender equality.

However, the voices are raising and I’ll give you just some examples:

- At the Global Conference on Victim Assistance and Disability Rights in Jordan, survivors raised this as one of issues that needs to be addressed. Others who have raised this are the Afghan Landmine Survivors’ Organization and the Latin American Network of Survivors. And I am sure that many of us who work on victim assistance have witnessed or heard about this violence. I can tell such situations have been shared with me by women survivors in diverse countries such as Senegal, Yemen, Cambodia and Colombia, so this is not context-specific.

By now, you are probably all familiar with the “twin track approach” to disability, but some of you may be surprised to learn that this approach comes initially from gender studies. It requires:

- 1) Including women on equal basis with men in all policies and programs, which is what are trying to do in victim assistance; but that is not enough. It also requires:

- 2) Ensuring there are specific measures to empower women and to respond to their specific needs and priorities- such as addressing gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health.

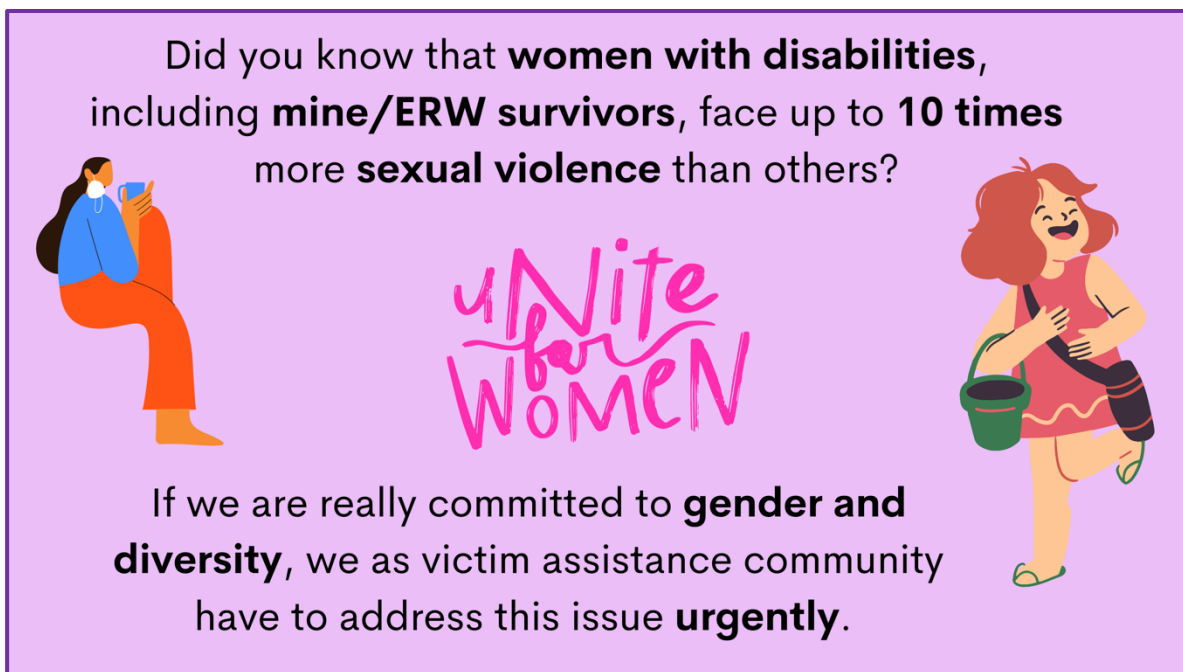
With this in mind, I would like to share five recommendations:

1. Carry out research or support research to clearly identify the situations of violence faced by women and girls with disabilities including survivors in affected areas, ideally led by or at least with the active participation of women survivors.
2. In programming victim assistance, carry out focus groups to identify and characterize the situations of violence faced by survivors and other women with disabilities.
3. Train women with disabilities including survivors on gender-based violence and the right to a life free of violence. Sexism and violence is so widespread that many of them are not aware of their rights in this regard, nor of the fact that the State has an obligation to put an end to such violence.
4. In communities affected by mine/ERW, identify and liaise with institutions working on responding to gender-based violence, and include them in the directory of services.
5. Ensure international cooperation on gender-based violence includes survivors and other women with disabilities.

6. Share good practices that you may have in VA forums and let us include colleagues from UNFPA and UNWOMEN in our victim assistance events.

Let us start to think about this issue collectively and take concrete action to move forward. In closing, I invite you to check the executive summaries of publications I mentioned earlier and feel free to reach to us at the GWG to discuss further.

Thank you very much and now it is my great pleasure to introduce my dear friend and much-admired colleague Abia, who will share her perspective on this topic and what we can do about it. Thanks so much Abia for being here.



Did you know that **women with disabilities**, including **mine/ERW survivors**, face up to **10 times** more **sexual violence** than others?

UNite for WOMEN

If we are really committed to **gender and diversity**, we as victim assistance community have to address this issue **urgently**.