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149th IPU Assembly

Geneva
13–17 October 2024



Open session of the Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Law

Armed conflict and disability: Enhancing parliamentary action to address disability during armed conflicts and their aftermath

Debate organized within the framework of the 25th anniversary of the entry into force of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention

*Tuesday, 15 October 2024, 11:30–13:00,
Salle Genève (CCV, annex to the CICG)*

Concept note

Background

Armed conflicts mean devastating loss of civilian life and massive population displacement, as well as severe and long-lasting effects for those most vulnerable, including persons with disabilities. Armed conflicts not only generate new disabilities but also exacerbate the existing barriers faced by persons with disabilities.

2024 marks the 25th anniversary of the entry into force of the [Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention \(APMBC\)](#) – a landmark instrument in the overall architecture of efforts to end the suffering caused by weapons and armed conflict. The Convention places emphasis on the harm caused by anti-personnel mines and their impact on civilians and (former) combatants long after a conflict has ended.

Anti-personnel mines, as well as cluster munitions and other conventional weapons, have the potential to directly render persons disabled (when a landmine blast results in amputation, for instance). According to the [Landmine Monitor 2023](#), at least 4,710 mine-related casualties were recorded in 2022, and the threat of anti-personnel mines was observed in 60 countries and territories. Armed conflict also severely impacts persons with disabilities, affecting their capacity to access basic services, such as health care, water, sanitation, shelter and food (as well as other necessary services relating to their pre-existing disabilities). They may also face physical and/or communication barriers to accessing emergency information and humanitarian assistance in these contexts.

Regardless of how armed conflict creates disabilities or exacerbates pre-existing impairments, persons with disabilities remain the “[forgotten victims of armed conflict](#)”. Nevertheless, they represent the largest minority group in the world: according to the World Health Organization, [an estimated 1.3 billion people](#) – approximately 16% of the world’s population – experience some form of disability. It is thus crucial to both prevent disability caused by armed conflict as well as protect persons with disabilities who find themselves in armed conflict situations.

Legal instruments have either been established or have incorporated provisions aimed at responding to these challenges. International humanitarian law (IHL), through both [treaty](#) and [customary law](#), requires parties to armed conflicts to afford special respect and protection to persons with disabilities and helps ensure their inclusion. At the same time, it [prohibits](#) the use of means and methods of warfare that cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering, which often render people disabled. The [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (CRPD) also imposes on State Parties the obligation to take all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including armed conflict.

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States have also put in place legal instruments with the goal of preventing certain disabilities from occurring by prohibiting the use of particular weapons and reducing the dangers they pose, such as the APMB and [Convention on Cluster Munitions](#) (CCM). Both instruments integrate victim assistance commitments (Art. 6 APMB and Art. 5 CCM) whereby States agree on a collective responsibility to help advance care and rehabilitation for victims of such weapons. These instruments have been at the core of the international efforts to recognize the rights of persons injured or rendered disabled due to the use of those weapons.

In celebration of the 25th anniversary of the entry into force of the APMB in 2024, and in the lead up to the [Global Disability Summit 2025](#), this open session will discuss how parliamentary action can contribute to advance and ensure the rights of persons with disabilities during armed conflicts and their aftermath. Parliaments play a key role in the ratification/accession process by which their State becomes party to the above-mentioned legal instruments. Parliamentarians may also establish dedicated mechanisms or structures to monitor the implementation of international obligations on disability rights, as well as adopt informed and tailored laws and policies that recognize the rights of persons with disabilities during armed conflicts and secure care and rehabilitation for survivors of weapon contamination and their families. Likewise, parliamentary action is essential to allocate sufficient budget to risk education and victim assistance programmes.

Building on its work in this area (see, for instance, the [IPU Handbook for Parliamentarians on IHL](#) and the [IPU Handbook for Parliamentarians on the CRPD](#)), and as part of the peace and security policy focus under its [2022-2026 Strategy](#), the IPU is committed to helping parliamentarians make progress on tackling the impacts of armed conflict on persons with disabilities and on the potential of weapons in generating disability.

Guiding questions

1. What are the main challenges faced by persons with disabilities during armed conflicts? How are their vulnerabilities exacerbated and what are their main protection needs?
2. What are the main needs of those who have been rendered disabled as a consequence of the use of weapons (such as anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions) in armed conflicts?
3. What strategies can be developed to enhance accession to key instruments such as the APMB and CCM? How can we advance on the road to universalization of such instruments?
4. How can parliaments, through their legislative, budgetary and oversight functions, ensure that the rights of persons with disabilities during armed conflicts and their aftermath, provided for by legal instruments, are recognized and respected at the national level?
5. What can parliaments do to ensure assistance to persons rendered disabled due to the use of weapons such as anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions?

Moderator: Mr. John Kiarie, President of the IPU Committee to Promote Respect for International Humanitarian Law and Member of the Parliament of Kenya

Keynote address: Ensuring disability rights through the universalization of the APMB
H.R.H. Prince Mired of Jordan, Special Envoy on the Universalization of the APMB

Panelists:

- **Disability as a consequence of the use of weapons in armed conflicts:
A mine-survivor testimony**
Ms. Gnep Smoeun, Spokesperson of Handicap International (Humanity & Inclusion)
- **The protection of persons with disabilities in armed conflicts under IHL**
Mr. Alexander Breitegger, Senior Legal Adviser, ICRC
- **Disability rights and armed conflict: a parliamentary perspective from Burkina Faso**
Mr. Souleymane Ouedraogo, Member of the Transitional Legislative Assembly (Burkina Faso) (TBC)

Presentations will be followed by a discussion with participants.