



# Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Distr.: General  
27 July 2021

Original: English

---

**Conference of States Parties to the Convention  
on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**  
**Fourteenth session**  
New York, 15–17 June 2021

## **Report of the fourteenth session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

### **I. Introduction**

1. The fourteenth session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was held in person at United Nations Headquarters in New York on 15 June 2021 and virtually, without physical presence, on 16 and 17 June 2021.
2. Six meetings were held during the fourteenth session of the Conference. On 15 June, the 1st and 2nd meetings were convened to elect officers and consider the agenda items on the opening of the session, the adoption of the agenda, the organization of work, the decisions by the Conference of States Parties and the general debate. Three round-table discussions were held at the 3rd, 4th and 5th meetings, on 16 and 17 June. At its 6th meeting, on 17 June, the Conference considered agenda item 5 (c), “Interactive dialogue among States parties, the United Nations system and other stakeholders on the implementation of the Convention”, and item 7, “Closure of the session”.
3. The text of the decisions adopted by the Conference is contained in annex I, the President’s summary of the session in annex II and the list of non-governmental organizations accredited to the Conference in annex III.

### **II. Opening of the session**

4. The Conference was opened by the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs in his capacity as the temporary President of the Conference.
5. At its 1st meeting, the Conference adopted the provisional agenda (CRPD/CSP/2021/1), agreed on the organization of work for the session and approved the text of its decisions.



6. Under agenda item 2, the following were elected by acclamation as members of the Bureau: the Permanent Representative of Finland to the United Nations, Jukka Salovaara, as the President of the Conference; and the First Secretary of the Permanent Mission of Poland to the United Nations, Bogna Ruminowicz, the Deputy Permanent Representative of Iraq to the United Nations, Sarhad Sardar Abdulrahman Fatah, the Deputy Permanent Representative of Zambia to the United Nations, Muhabi James Lungu, and the Minister Counsellor of the Permanent Mission of Guatemala to the United Nations, Libna Elubina Bonilla Alarcón, as the Vice-Presidents of the Conference.

7. Opening statements were made by the President of the Conference and the President of the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly. Video messages were delivered by the Secretary-General; the Chair of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Rosemary Kayess; the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, Gerard Quinn; the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility, María Soledad Cisternas Reyes; and the Executive Director of She Writes Woman, Hauwa Ojeifo, representing civil society.

8. Pursuant to rule 25, paragraph 5 (c), of the rules of procedure, and under agenda item 4, nine new non-governmental organizations were accredited to the Conference (see annex III).

### III. Matters related to the implementation of the Convention

#### A. General debate

9. Under agenda item 5 (a), statements were made by 69 States parties, including one regional integration organization (the European Union),<sup>1</sup> 4 country groups<sup>2</sup> and 17 institutions and organizations observing the Conference, including 16 non-governmental organizations<sup>3</sup> and 1 United Nations system entity (the United Nations Institute for Training and Research). Written statements were also received from 14 States parties as their contributions to the meeting under the agenda item.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Statements were delivered, in chronological order, by: Finland, Norway, Philippines, Canada, Italy, New Zealand, Belgium, San Marino, United Arab Emirates, Nauru, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, European Union, Burkina Faso, Mongolia, Kenya, Malta, Luxembourg, Ukraine, Guyana, Ghana, Ecuador, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Lithuania, Mexico, Portugal, Russian Federation, Poland, India, Kyrgyzstan, Argentina, Jamaica, Singapore, Romania, South Africa, Cambodia, Armenia, Hungary, Chile, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Colombia, China, Afghanistan, Peru, Bulgaria, Côte d'Ivoire, Spain, Israel, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Turkey, Honduras, Dominican Republic, Sri Lanka, Japan, Slovenia, Qatar, Iraq, Australia, Sweden, Costa Rica, Namibia, Morocco, Republic of Moldova, Denmark, France, Andorra and Cuba.

<sup>2</sup> Joint statements were delivered by: New Zealand on behalf of the Group of Friends of Persons with Disabilities; Brunei on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN); Republic of Korea on behalf of the MIKTA Group (Mexico, Indonesia, the Republic of Korea, Turkey and Australia); and Ecuador on behalf of the LGBTI Core Group.

<sup>3</sup> The International Disability Alliance, Inclusion International, the European Disability Forum, United Disabled Persons of Kenya, the Global Initiative for Inclusive ICTs, the European Network on Independent Living, the Christian Blind Mission (CBM), the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment, the Center for the Human Rights of Users and Survivors of Psychiatry, Sightsavers, the International Federation of Anti-Leprosy Associations, Leonard Cheshire Disability, Athena Fund, Shanta Memorial Rehabilitation Centre, the World Federation of the Deaf and the European Union of the Deaf.

<sup>4</sup> Ireland, Algeria, El Salvador, Iceland, Kiribati, Libya, Malaysia, Nepal, Senegal, Panama, Paraguay, Thailand, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Viet Nam.

## **B. Round-table discussions**

10. On 16 and 17 June, the Conference held three round tables at its 3rd, 4th and 5th meetings. At each round table, presentations were given by a panel of speakers, which were followed by interactive discussions.

### **Round table 1**

#### **Protecting the rights of persons with disabilities in armed conflict and humanitarian emergencies**

11. The round-table discussion, under agenda item 5 (b) (i), was co-chaired by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Poland and Vice-President of the Conference, Mateusz Sakowicz, and civil society representative and President of the Arab Organization of Persons with Disabilities, Lebanon, Nawaf Kabbara. Presentations were given by five panellists: the country coordinator for the Abilis Foundation and the founder of Action on Disability Rights and Development Nepal, Birendra Raj Pokharel; the Deputy Commissioner of the Comprehensive Action Group against Anti-Personnel Mines, Office of the High Commissioner for Peace, Colombia, Martha Isabel Hurtado Granada; a protection officer at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Ricardo Pla Cordero; an independent human rights expert, Alice Priddy; and a representative of the Latin American Network of Organizations of Persons with Disabilities and their Families (RIADIS), Henry Murillo Salazar.

### **Round table 2**

#### **Living independently and being included in the community**

12. The round-table discussion, under agenda item 5 (b) (ii), was co-chaired by the Minister Counsellor of the Permanent Mission of Guatemala and Vice-President of the Conference, Libna Elubina Bonilla Alarcón, and civil society representative and founding member and Scientific Director of the International Network on the Disability Creation Process, Patrick Fougeyrollas. Presentations were given by five panellists: the Chair of the China Disabled Persons' Federation and the President of Rehabilitation International, Heidi Zhang; the Government Counsellor in the field of disability and the elderly and the President of the National Council for Disability Equality, Ecuador, Xavier Torres; the Secretary-General of the Finnish Disability Forum and a member of the Executive Committee of the European Disability Forum, Pirkko Mahlamäki; the Team Leader and Coordinator of the Disability and Rehabilitation Team, Department of Violence, Injury Prevention and Disability, World Health Organization, Alarcos Cieza; and the President of Sociedad y Discapacidad, Peru, Alberto Vásquez.

### **Round table 3**

#### **Right to education: challenges with inclusive education and accessibility during the coronavirus disease pandemic**

13. The round-table discussion, under agenda item 5 (b) (iii), was co-chaired by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Iraq and Vice-President of the Conference, Sarhad Sardar Abdulrahman Fatah, and a civil society representative and President of the International Federation of Hard of Hearing People, Ruth Warick. Presentations were given by five panellists: a lawyer, university lecturer and board member of a bilingual school for deaf students in Japan, Hiroshi Tamon; the Chief Executive Officer of Children and Young People with Disability Australia, Mary Sayers; the founder and President of the Association of Social Responsibility for Children and Youth, Greece, Athena Kritikou; a representative of the World Federation of the Deaf and member of the Inclusive Education Task Team of the International Disability

Alliance, Victoria Manning; and a student and advocate speaking on behalf of Asociación Colombiana Síndrome de Down (Asdown) Colombia, Laura Ximena Gonzales Valeda.

### **C. Interactive dialogue among States parties, the United Nations system and other stakeholders on the implementation of the Convention**

14. Agenda item 5 (c) was addressed at the 6th meeting, which was chaired by the President of the Conference. Presentations were given by seven panellists: the Senior Adviser on Policy of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, Ana Maria Menéndez; the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Liu Zhenmin; the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ilze Brands Kehris; the Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, UNHCR, Gillian Triggs; the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Henrietta Fore; the Manager of the Technical Secretariat of the United Nations Partnership to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Ola Abualghaib; and the Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), Åsa Regnér.

15. Presentations were also given by representatives of other mandate-holders and stakeholders: the Chair of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Rosemary Kayess; the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, Gerard Quinn; the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility, María Soledad Cisternas Reyes; and a civil society representative and Chair of the Advisory Panel of the International Federation of Anti-Leprosy Associations, Mathias Duck.

## **IV. Decisions by the Conference of States Parties**

16. At its 1st meeting, under agenda item 6, the Conference unanimously adopted three decisions proposed by its Bureau (see annex I).

## **V. Closure of the session**

17. At the closing of the session, statements were made by the representatives of Guatemala, Iraq, Poland and Zambia, in their capacity as Vice-Presidents of the Conference.

18. The President of the Conference, in his closing statement, expressed his appreciation to all States parties and to the Secretariat for their cooperation and strong support in making the fourteenth session of the Conference of States Parties a success.

19. The Conference was adjourned at 5 p.m. on 17 June 2021.

## Annex I

### **Decisions by the Conference of States Parties**

At its fourteenth session, the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities adopted the following decisions:

#### **Decision 1**

##### **Venue and timing of the fifteenth session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

The Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, recalling General Assembly resolution [61/106](#) and taking into consideration rule 1, paragraphs 1 and 2, of the rules of procedure of the Conference, decides that its fifteenth session will be held at Headquarters from 14 to 16 June 2022.

#### **Decision 2**

##### **Resources and support for the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

The Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities notes the provision of resources and support for the fourteenth session of the Conference and reiterates its recommendation to the Secretary-General to continue providing adequate support to the Conference at its fifteenth and future sessions.

#### **Decision 3**

##### **Request to the Secretary-General to transmit the report of the fourteenth session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

The Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities decides to request the Secretary-General to transmit the report of the Conference on its fourteenth session to all States parties and observers.

## Annex II

### **President's summary of the fourteenth session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

#### **Opening of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

1. In his opening statement, the President of the Conference, Jukka Salovaara, noted that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had had a disproportionate impact on persons with disabilities, mainly owing to the lack of disability-inclusive response and recovery measures and the lack of necessary resources and support for persons with disabilities. In response to the challenges posed by the pandemic, the fourteenth session had taken place in a hybrid format, including through virtual meetings, which served as an accessible platform through which States parties could convene without travelling and facing the dangers of the pandemic. Outlining the importance of fostering inclusion, the President emphasized how the fourteenth session had been making efforts to promote the participation and leadership of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations by inviting and supporting many civil society organizations to participate in official programme meetings, as well as in many other events and activities to address specific issues facing persons with disabilities. Moving forward, the President called on States parties to enhance their efforts to build back better with a view to implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in line with the Convention, in COVID-19 response and recovery processes. He ended by encouraging States parties to engage in the session discussions with the aim of advancing human rights and building an inclusive and equal society for all.

2. The President of the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly, Volkan Bozkir, recommended that States parties recognize and address shortfalls and challenges in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic and learn from the experience by taking note of successes, in order to prepare for inevitable future emergencies. As the world embarked on a process of restoration and of building back better, the international community must seize the opportunity to make transformational changes in order to create a sustainable and equitable future for all, including persons with disabilities, especially since the COVID-19 crisis and its impacts had been more pronounced for that group. He also stressed the need for inclusivity and empowerment in the recovery process. Finally, he emphasized the role played by the United Nations system, the General Assembly and its Member States, adding that that role must be strengthened to better support national and local governments in implementing such actions.

3. In a video message, the Secretary-General stated that ensuring human rights and advancing the inclusion of persons with disabilities were priorities for the United Nations. In that regard, 66 United Nations system entities had reported that they were taking action and making initial progress in the implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy. He noted that, during COVID-19 response and recovery processes, countries were encountering challenges in their efforts to include all persons with disabilities, especially those in more vulnerable situations. He highlighted that vaccine distribution was an important step in the COVID-19 recovery process in which persons with disabilities could be left behind or excluded. He ended by calling for enhanced collaboration for the full and effective implementation of the Convention.

4. The Chair of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Rosemary Kayess, provided updates on the work of the Committee over the preceding year. She emphasized that the Committee had organized a number of general discussions in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic to facilitate the drafting of the general comment on the right to employment of persons with disabilities. The intersessional work of the Committee also made use of the online environment. The Committee had undertaken a series of online regional consultations with civil society, especially organizations of persons with disabilities, with a view to moving from isolation, invisibility and segregation to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the community. Those consultations had been held in response to the abandonment and confinement of persons with disabilities in many kinds of institutions, which was an ongoing issue of grave concern that had been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The consultations were the first step in the process of enabling the Committee to develop guidelines to help States parties ensure, as part of their efforts to build back better, that persons with disabilities could live independently and were included in the community.

5. The Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities of the Human Rights Council, Gerard Quinn, emphasized the need to build back better, as the initial COVID-19 policy reactions in some countries had revealed deep-seated and structural inequalities. He said that States parties must make a greater effort to confront segregation, exclusion and invisibility. He noted that it was particularly important to ensure that the massive sums of public monies dedicated to recovery were not used to refurbish old policies that perpetuated the segregation of persons with disabilities. He highlighted the need to consult with persons with disabilities when developing policies that addressed their fundamental rights. The process of building back better could not be done without consulting the architects of change, namely persons with disabilities; otherwise, he argued, the house that was built would be structurally flawed. He welcomed, in particular, the sessions on the two subthemes of armed conflicts and independent living in communities. He stressed that building back better after conflict required all stakeholders to honour the role played by persons with disabilities in peacekeeping and to create much more intentional space for it in the future, as well as to directly confront the culture of segregation.

6. The Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility, María Soledad Cisternas Reyes, stressed the urgent need to address several issues, which had been identified as priorities by the Secretary-General and were core mandates of her work. Those issues included addressing poverty and inequalities, since 80 per cent of persons with disabilities lived in developing countries, and many were the poorest of the poor; achieving gender equality, with a focus on women and girls with disabilities; and reversing attacks on human rights. In that regard, it was important to raise awareness of human rights violations experienced by persons with disabilities, as they were too often suppressed, as well as to address violence and bullying toward girls with disabilities in educational settings. Lastly, she reported that, during the fourteenth session of the Conference, her office would launch an initiative with a focus on policing and on increasing access to justice for persons with disabilities.

7. In a recorded message, the Executive Director of She Writes Woman, Hauwa Ojeifo, stated that the world had not moved fast enough for persons with disabilities and that many of them still had not been given full and equal recognition before the law. She focused on the inhuman treatment faced by persons with psychosocial disabilities in her own country, Nigeria, and in others. Many countries still had policies and practices that endorsed institutionalization and forced treatment, and some continued to build facilities that could further isolate, rather than provide community-based support to, persons with disabilities. She urged all States parties to

foster partnerships with persons with disabilities to collectively build a more equal and just world for all.

## **Round-table discussions**

### **Round table 1**

#### **Protecting the rights of persons with disabilities in armed conflict and humanitarian emergencies**

8. The Deputy Permanent Representative of Poland and Vice-President of the Conference, Mateusz Sakowicz, and a civil society representative and President of the Arab Organization of Persons with Disabilities, Lebanon, Nawaf Kabbara, co-chaired the first round-table discussion.

9. The Country Coordinator for the Abilis Foundation and the founder of Action on Disability Rights and Development Nepal, Birendra Raj Pokharel, discussed how national humanitarian laws and international human rights laws intersected and how common principles could be embraced in national human rights legislation. He noted that the guiding principles of the Convention should be embraced in domestic legislation and policy action, notably respect for dignity and autonomy; non-discrimination; effective participation and inclusion in society; respect for diversity; equality of opportunity; accessibility; gender equality; and respect for the changing capacities of children with disabilities. He outlined how the Abilis Foundation supported women and girls with disabilities in Nepal, and he cited the Foundation's commitment to eliminating gender-based violence. He also illustrated how the Abilis Foundation supported Nepal in its efforts to ensure more effective needs assessments in post-disaster recovery plans. Lastly, he reiterated the importance of ensuring the organizational representation of persons with disabilities to further advance their rights.

10. The Deputy Commissioner of the Comprehensive Action Group against Anti-Personnel Mines of the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace, Colombia, Martha Isabel Hurtado Granada, shared the experience of Colombia in the protection of persons with disabilities from anti-personnel mines. She highlighted that persons with disabilities faced attitudinal stigmatization perpetuated by physical and communication barriers, which must be broken down. She announced that Colombia had introduced a new methodological tool, called the "Comprehensive Care Tool", to facilitate the restoration of the rights of survivors of anti-personnel mines, with the aim of ensuring that all survivors and their families received information on the rights to which affected persons were entitled and on how to gain access to the rehabilitation resources and services that they might require. The Comprehensive Care Tool had also led to government budgetary contributions to anti-personnel mine training on conducting risk assessments in areas with mines. She concluded by highlighting the need to discuss how to facilitate care in the future and the need for coordination among health care providers and local authorities in her country.

11. A protection officer at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Ricardo Pla Cordero, focused on a number of UNHCR recommendations for strengthening the rights of persons with disabilities in situations of armed conflict. He noted that conflicts during the COVID-19 pandemic had led to more forced displacements, poverty, loss of employment and interruption of service, owing to barriers to access to international protection, as well as inaccessible asylum procedures, including inaccessible transport. As services had moved online during the COVID-19 pandemic, there had been increased inequality in service provision for persons with disabilities as a result of the use of inappropriate technological means and digital resources. Persons with disabilities continued to experience barriers when

seeking asylum, for example owing to a lack of sign language interpretation. He highlighted the invisibility of persons with disabilities in data on displacement and emphasized the need for accessibility in social protection systems, noting that persons with disabilities who sought asylum often faced legal, financial and health barriers. He also outlined the importance of including organizations of persons with disabilities in efforts to address those issues and in the development of solutions that could be employed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

12. An independent human rights expert, Alice Priddy, began by reiterating that conflict had a devastating impact on persons with disabilities. She listed a number of cases in which persons with disabilities in situations of conflict had been unable to flee or evacuate owing to existing physical barriers, such as inaccessible transport, and systemic issues, such as prohibitions on support dogs in evacuations. When organizations of persons with disabilities were meaningfully consulted, inclusive humanitarian responses could be created. She stated that persons with disabilities had the best understanding of their own needs and the barriers that they faced and should therefore be consulted during the design, delivery and monitoring of systems of administration and protection. She also underscored the importance of disability-disaggregated data and argued that all United Nations peacekeeping personnel should be trained on the rights-based approach and on the diversity of disability and intersectionality. Lastly, she called on States and donors to recognize their responsibility to ensure the inclusive provision of humanitarian aid, including in COVID-19 recovery, peace processes and transitional justice mechanisms.

13. A representative of the Latin American Network of Organizations of Persons with Disabilities and their Families (RIADIS), Henry Murillo Salazar, began by sharing his personal experience of being a victim of police violence, which had led to permanent damage to his spine, and of subsequently becoming an adviser on the inclusion of persons with disabilities and an active member of national and regional disability networks. He emphasized that persons with disabilities must be included in peacebuilding processes, as to approach peacebuilding without acknowledging and including persons with disabilities was exclusionary. He also noted that government reports must be presented in accessible formats, and he reiterated that persons with disabilities must be consulted on government decisions that sought to undo systematic exclusion. Noting that the COVID-19 pandemic had brought issues of exclusion to the forefront given the inaccessibility of communications about the virus and the imposition of cuts to in-person care, he argued that now was the time for States and other stakeholders to act.

## **Round table 2**

### **Living independently and being included in the community**

14. The round-table discussion was co-chaired by the Minister Counsellor of the Permanent Mission of Guatemala and Vice-President of the Conference, Libna Elubina Bonilla Alarcóna, and a civil society representative and founding member and Scientific Director of the International Network on the Disability Creation Process, Patrick Fougeyrollas.

15. The Chair of the China Disabled Persons' Federation and the current global President of Rehabilitation International, Heidi Zhang, highlighted the steps that China was taking to promote independent living for persons with disabilities through rehabilitation and empowerment. She highlighted the importance of mobilizing adequate resources in the post-pandemic era to support persons with disabilities, increasing innovation in science and technology to enhance accessibility and inclusivity and strengthening international cooperation and exchange, with the aim of improving the independent living of persons with disabilities.

16. The Government Counsellor in the field of disability and the elderly and the President of the National Council for Disability Equality, Ecuador, Xavier Torres, noted the various interpretations of independent living and recognized the importance of mobility, integration and inclusivity. Based on the experience of Ecuador, he argued that it was vital to recognize how communities could play a role in stimulating and strengthening independent living for their peers with disabilities. He stated that support and solidarity from families and neighbourhoods were not synonymous with dependency; rather, it was friendly, accessible and supportive environments that facilitated independence and made it possible for many persons with disabilities to live independently in their communities. Lastly, he underscored the importance of ordinances that promoted, enabled and facilitated the exercise, by persons with disabilities, of their right to live independently and to be truly included in and participate in the community.

17. The Secretary-General of the Finnish Disability Forum and a member of the Executive Committee of the European Disability Forum, Pirkko Mahlamäki, spoke of her work defending the rights of over 100 million persons with disabilities in Europe. She brought attention to the fact that many persons with disabilities in Europe were still excluded from their communities. Noting that the progress achieved thus far had been uneven, she criticized institutionalization for giving persons with disabilities little choice over their own schedule or choice of caregivers, especially for those who were institutionalized involuntarily. She recommended that strategies to combat climate change and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic should include the voices of persons with disabilities at every stage of development and implementation. She emphasized that no financial resources should be spent on programmes or projects that could segregate persons with disabilities from the rest of their communities, and she stressed that States must invest in accessible and affordable public housing. She concluded that independent living was not just about residing in a community, but rather about being fully included in that community.

18. The Team Leader and Coordinator of the Disability and Rehabilitation Team, Department of Violence, Injury Prevention and Disability at the World Health Organization, Alarcos Cieza, noted the existence of severe shortcomings in the protections for persons with disabilities, which had been made evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of those challenges included the higher likelihood among persons with disabilities of falling severely ill from COVID-19 and developing new or worsening health conditions. Additionally, socioeconomic isolation had exacerbated poverty for many persons with disabilities. She also reiterated that the World Health Organization was committed to strengthening community-based development by providing health care and services, promoting technological advancements and advocating disability inclusion and the rights of persons with disabilities in all efforts to build back better.

19. The President of Sociedad y Discapacidad, Peru, Alberto Vásquez, noted the importance of recognizing the vast wealth of diversity within societies, and even within the disability community itself, and emphasized that all individuals had the right to live in the community with dignity and freedom. With regard to independent living, he was of the view that very few countries had fully implemented the Convention, despite having ratified it. He encouraged States parties to adopt holistic policies to deinstitutionalize persons with disabilities, especially considering how mental health patients were abandoned in hospitals and by society. Underscoring the utmost importance of de-medicalizing disability and recognizing psychosocial diversity, he emphasized the need for legislation to take a rights-based approach towards disability issues.

**Round table 3****Right to education: challenges with inclusive education and accessibility during the coronavirus disease pandemic**

20. The round-table discussion was co-chaired by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Iraq and Vice-President of the Conference, Sarhad Sardar Abdulrahman Fatah, and a civil society representative and President of the International Federation of Hard of Hearing People, Ruth Warick.

21. A lawyer, university lecturer and board member of a bilingual school for deaf students in Japan, Hiroshi Tamon, described the difficulties that he had experienced throughout his educational experience as a result of being deaf. To combat the challenges that many persons with disabilities faced, he suggested that governments should provide adequate, reasonable accommodation, which was indispensable for persons with disabilities, including those who were deaf. While many governments were promoting the use of information and communication technologies in education during the COVID-19 pandemic, accessibility must be assured for students with disabilities, including through the provision of subtitles or sign language interpretation. He also emphasized the importance of bilingual education for deaf pupils; to that end, more teachers, especially deaf teachers, should be trained in the use of sign language. Lastly, he suggested that opportunities should be provided for students with and without disabilities to learn together at the same schools in order to foster a culture of respect and mutual understanding.

22. The Chief Executive Officer of Children and Young People with Disability Australia, Mary Sayers, stated that the rights and needs of children and young persons with disabilities were often overlooked in public policies and actions. Children and youth with disabilities were disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and their needs were often not targeted in COVID-19 responses. Some examples included the absence of sufficient mental health care, increased isolation and neglect and a lack of inclusion in virtual education platforms. She suggested that governments should make inclusive education a priority and should continue working towards the full protection of children and youth with disabilities, through concrete actions such as legislative and policy reform, parent education, awareness-raising in communities and improved monitoring and accountability in order to promote a culture of inclusion.

23. The founder and President of the Association of Social Responsibility for Children and Youth, Greece, Athena Kritikou, noted how misconceptions and ignorance about the challenges facing children with disabilities prevented governments from developing inclusive policies. She stated that awareness-raising programmes and the interactions with young persons with disabilities within schools were some of many key factors in challenging stereotypes and discrimination and changing attitudes towards disabilities. To pave the way for inclusive education, it was crucial that States parties honoured their obligations under the Convention, including by ensuring the deployment of educational action to raise awareness of disability at the national level and in all educational systems for all students both with and without disabilities.

24. A representative of the World Federation of the Deaf and a member of the International Disability Alliance Inclusive Education Task Team, Victoria Manning, highlighted that the Convention established the right to inclusive education and accessible resources for persons with disabilities, including deaf persons. To achieve inclusive education for learners, deaf children must be able to access high quality instruction delivered in national sign languages regardless of where they attended school, which would require a critical mass of language users and fluent language models. In the context of the COVID-19 crisis, she called on governments to ensure that deaf children and youth received equitable access to information and education

in national sign languages during and after the pandemic. She also suggested providing more access to sign language education, which could be achieved by increasing the number of sign language teachers. In addition, governments should take steps to improve remote access to sign language services and to commit to working with the deaf community.

25. An advocate speaking on behalf of Asociación Colombiana Síndrome de Down (Asdown) Colombia, Laura Ximena Gonzales Valeda, outlined the severe challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic posed for persons with disabilities. A report from Inclusion International showed that persons with disabilities did not have access to virtual education and were unable to socialize with peers via remote learning, thereby exacerbating isolation and exclusion. In addition, 35 per cent of students with disabilities had been pulled out of school entirely, owing to the inability of many schools to provide reasonable accommodation for teaching students with disabilities. Those problems, along with the severe challenges that parents and caretakers of persons with disabilities faced during the pandemic, demonstrated the urgent need for governments and educators to further commit to building back better and guaranteeing inclusive and accessible education for students with disabilities.

### **Interactive dialogue among States parties, the United Nations system and other stakeholders on the implementation of the Convention**

26. The President of the Conference opened and chaired the interactive dialogue. The Senior Adviser on Policy at the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, Ana Maria Menéndez, highlighted that, in the two years since the launch of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, a number of United Nations system entities had already seen positive results in its implementation. In 2020, 66 United Nations system entities had reported on their implementation of the Strategy, which had marked a 15 per cent increase over the preceding year. In December 2020, all 130 United Nations country teams had reported on their implementation of the Strategy, which had enabled the Executive Office of the Secretary-General to establish the first ever baseline on disability inclusion at country level. As a result, persons with disabilities are being more included in strategic plans and budgets, thereby improving the Secretary-General's agenda for making the United Nations more inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities. While initiatives had been taken over the reporting period in areas such as public procurement and communications, more needed to be done to make greater progress. In responses to the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 crisis, targeted resources were being developed, and support was being provided to ensure that the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19 took into account disability inclusion. As an example of mainstreaming disability inclusion in COVID-19 responses, she reported that 54,000 persons with disabilities in six countries were being supported through the Central Emergency Response Fund. She thanked Member States for their support for the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy and urged them to continue to invest in disability inclusion and retain it as a priority moving forward.

27. The Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Liu Zhenmin, noted that the Department of Economic and Social Affairs had launched a programme in May 2020, through the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, to support disability-inclusive COVID-19 response and recovery at country and global levels. The Department had conducted analytical research on the participation and leadership of persons with disabilities in decision-making processes. The Department was also improving accessibility in both virtual and in-person meetings by creating support systems to meet the needs of persons with various

disabilities. In implementing the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, the Department had issued its first specific policy and action plan and had established a network with focal points from all divisions that was committed to promoting disability inclusion. The Department also continued to administer the United Nations Voluntary Fund on Disability, which provided technical assistance and capacity-building to support the rights and inclusive development of persons with disabilities.

28. The Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Ilze Brands Kehris, described case studies which showed that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, persons with disabilities – in particular those living in institutionalized settings – were being left behind in all sectors, including health care, social protection, data collection and disaggregation, participation, information and international aid. To address those challenges OHCHR had begun the process of developing a strategy, to be known as “Community 2030”, which would be aimed at improving the foundation of support for persons with disabilities, and called upon States to ensure speedy and equitable access to vaccinations. Furthermore, the Office was working to improve data collection with a view to better addressing high-risk conflicts and challenges.

29. The Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, UNHCR, Gillian Triggs, noted the disproportionate challenges that forcibly displaced persons with disabilities – who represented 12 million of the 79.5 million persons around the world who were forcibly displaced at that time – had faced in response to conflict, violence, persecution, poverty and inequality. UNHCR operations provided direct cash and material assistance to at least 55,672 adults with disabilities and 7,948 children with disabilities. UNHCR also conducted targeted home visits and worked to improve access to education for thousands of persons with disabilities. UNHCR maintained its commitment to continually implement the Convention and to develop action plans to improve the living conditions of persons with disabilities.

30. The Executive Director of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), Henrietta Fore, focused on the impact of COVID-19 on the education of children with disabilities, who were already a vulnerable demographic group. Over the preceding year, lockdowns and decreased access to resources had increased the risk of violence, exploitation, abuse and academic struggle among children with disabilities. She highlighted the efforts made by UNICEF, in conjunction with its partners around the world, to provide assistive devices, vital products and emergency kits to children with disabilities who were struggling in humanitarian situations. UNICEF also supported efforts to strengthen and implement laws, policies and plans to facilitate inclusive education throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, taking into consideration the diverse identities and abilities of children with disabilities. In the future, UNICEF planned to improve the collection and analysis of data on access to education for children with disabilities with a view to formulating better responses and carrying on its agenda to defend the rights, and support the well-being, of children worldwide.

31. The Manager of the Technical Secretariat of the United Nations Partnership to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, United Nations Development Programme, Ola Abualghaib, described the Partnership as a collaborative partnership between the United Nations system and governments, donors and civil society, especially organizations of persons with disabilities, aimed at facilitating policy and system change at country level. She described the work carried out by the Partnership, as well as the specific results that the Multi-Partner Trust Fund helped achieve. She explained that the extensive and diverse makeup of the Fund, as well as its operating model, lent itself to innovation and shared learning. Thanks to its flexibility in resource mobilization, the Fund was well positioned to provide support to persons with disabilities who were disproportionately impacted during crises, including the

COVID-19 pandemic. However, she admitted that the resources required to provide such support were lacking.

32. The Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), Åsa Regnér, provided an update on the work that UN-Women was doing to empower women and girls with disabilities. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, UN-Women was making concerted efforts to ensure that its contribution to response and recovery efforts was inclusive of women and girls with disabilities. For example, in March 2020, it had conducted an online consultation of women leaders with disabilities from all regions to ensure that the emerging needs of their communities were being met. Additionally, UN-Women had been analysing the intersection between disability and gender, among other factors, to inform the development of inclusive and intersectional policy interventions. Lastly, she expressed her hope for enhanced collaboration within the United Nations system to support Member States towards building back better from the COVID-19 pandemic.

33. In the second part of the interactive dialogue, the Chair of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Rosemary Kayess, spoke about the prevalence of the segregation of persons with disabilities and the harm that it could cause. Segregation was present in many sectors, including education, care for older persons, mental health and employment. The Committee was tasked with addressing segregation and other issues by providing guidelines to States parties to support the implementation of the Convention in such a way as to ensure that persons with disabilities could enjoy their right to live independently and be included in their communities. She reported that the Committee had recently reinitiated regular joint dialogues with the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, which would help streamline processes, optimize resources and facilitate collaboration among mandate-holders with a view to protecting the rights of persons with disabilities, including persons with disabilities in situations of armed conflict and humanitarian emergencies.

34. The Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, Gerard Quinn, discussed his first thematic report on the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of armed conflicts. He proposed broadening the traditional approaches that focused on the effects of conflicts in order to consider the contributions of persons with disabilities to peacebuilding processes. He expressed his eagerness to finalize that work and thanked all States and other partners who had provided inputs for the report. The second topic discussed was artificial intelligence and disability and the inherent ableism in the coding of modern technologies. He also mentioned that his third thematic report would focus on the status of indigenous persons with disabilities. Lastly, he announced that he was planning a mission visit to Botswana in 2021 to engage with the State party and other stakeholders in the country.

35. The Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility, María Soledad Cisternas Reyes, laid out eight priorities that she was pursuing to support the Sustainable Development Goals: first, raising awareness of disability rights, including through online messages in 16 languages and 38 indigenous languages; second, mainstreaming disability rights in research, leadership and justice, with a particular focus on inclusive policing, including through the creation of an information leaflet made available during the eighty-eighth session of the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) General Assembly; third, promoting inclusive education and targeting issues such as the prevention of bullying; fourth, strengthening the presence of women with disabilities at the Generation Equality Forum, in 2021; fifth, developing a project on maternity and support for women with disabilities, which would result in a set of recommendations; sixth, producing comments on other documents from the perspective of human rights-based

approach to disability and universal accessibility and, during the most recent reporting period, publishing two studies on universal accessibility as a standard in human rights and in sustainable development; and eighth, developing a strategic alliance with United Cities and Local Governments to promote universal accessibility through local governments and municipalities.

36. A civil society representative and Chair of the Advisory Panel of the International Federation of Anti-Leprosy Associations, Paraguay, Mathias Duck, described the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on persons with leprosy. He reported that persons with leprosy still faced discrimination in equal rights and access to justice, adequate housing, education, health care and job opportunities, among other areas. There were still over 100 discriminatory laws against persons affected by leprosy worldwide. At the same time, political and other leaders, in addition to journalists, continued to use leprosy as a negative metaphor or even to use discriminatory language against persons affected by leprosy. Many persons with leprosy were left with no food or housing owing to unemployment, which made them more vulnerable to new leprosy-related impairments. In some places, States had attempted to isolate COVID-19 patients in close proximity to persons affected by leprosy, many of whom were already immunocompromised. Persons affected by leprosy had been excluded from COVID-19 testing, treatment and vaccination, even though the number of deaths from COVID-19 among persons with leprosy was disproportionately high. He concluded by stressing the importance of leprosy representation in the process of building back better and by asking States to eliminate the structural injustices and inequalities that affected persons with leprosy in almost every aspect of their lives.

### **Closure of the session**

37. Before the closing of the session, statements were made by members of the Bureau.

38. The Minister Counsellor of the Permanent Mission of Guatemala and Vice-President of the Conference, Libna Elubina Bonilla Alarcóna, emphasized the importance of independent living, the main subject of the round table that she had co-chaired during the session. She commended the increased number of initiatives that had been taken to transform the lives of persons with disabilities, such as the creation of accessible physical and virtual spaces and the development of new ways to best serve persons with disabilities living in both rural and urban communities through community-based development and services. She underscored the importance of increasing the representation of persons with disabilities in decision and policymaking processes, including regarding deinstitutionalization and independent living in communities.

39. The Deputy Permanent Representative of Iraq and Vice-President of the Conference, Sarhad Sardar Abdulrahman Fatah, focused his remarks on how the COVID-19 pandemic was exacerbating inaccessibility for persons with disabilities, especially those living in developing countries. Moreover, the scourge of terrorism seen in many countries disproportionately impacted children with disabilities, which was compounded by commonplace, yet deep-rooted, stigma. He argued that full access to education would help rectify much of the inequality faced by persons with disabilities.

40. The Deputy Permanent Representative of Poland and Vice-President of the Conference, Mateusz Sakowicz, echoed the remarks of his fellow Bureau members, underscoring that the COVID-19 pandemic had exposed vulnerabilities underpinned by systemic discrimination against persons with disabilities, who remained one of the most excluded groups in access to economic and social support. He noted that many

encouraging initiatives had been taken at local, national and global levels to combat COVID-19 among persons with disabilities. Furthermore, he thanked all panellists for their tireless efforts and advocacy for disability inclusion over the preceding year. He concluded by emphasizing the importance of adopting a rights-based approach to disability when developing response strategies for future public health emergencies.

41. The Deputy Permanent Representative of Zambia to the United Nations and Vice-President of the Conference, Muhabi James Lungu, referencing the overarching theme of the session of “building back better”, underscored that the socioeconomic consequences of the COVID-19 crisis had been more profound for persons with disabilities, thereby further exacerbating inequality, which must be addressed by incorporating the rights of persons with disabilities into national action. He added that Zambia has passed laws to mainstream disability and gender equality as an integral part of national policies, including in key sectors such as health and education. He reaffirmed his country’s commitment to the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in society and development.

42. In his closing remarks, the President of the Conference noted that 2021 was the second year in a row in which the session of the Conference had been organized under exceptional circumstances, taking into account restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. He acknowledged that it would not have been possible without the full cooperation of all stakeholders. He extended his thanks to all Bureau members, delegates, Secretariat staff and other participants for their hard work and dedication. He further highlighted the importance of meaningful engagement with, and participation of, persons with disabilities, their representative organizations and other major stakeholders in the Conference. The President expressed his hope that the session had served to promote the participation and engagement of persons with disabilities and their organizations in relevant developments, including in decision-making processes at national and international levels.

43. The President closed the session at 5 p.m. on 17 June 2021.

---

## Annex III

### **Non-governmental organizations accredited to the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities at its fourteenth session**

1. Research Institute of the Differently Abled Person's Right in Korea (RIDRIK)
  2. American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)
  3. Association of Women with Disabilities (ENGKAD)
  4. The Albino Foundation (TAF)
  5. CBM Global Disability Inclusion (CBM Global)
  6. Association for Disabled People (ADP)
  7. Center for Inclusive Policy (CIP)
  8. Center for International Studies (CIS), University of Southern California
  9. Disability Inclusive Development Programs and Services (DIDEPAS)
-