



Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Distr.: General
14 August 2023

Original: English

**Conference of States Parties to the Convention on
the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**
Sixteenth session
New York, 13–15 June 2023

Report of the sixteenth session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

I. Introduction

1. The sixteenth session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was held at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 13 to 15 June 2023.
2. Six meetings were held at the sixteenth session of the Conference. On 13 June, at its 1st and 2nd meetings, the Conference elected the officers of the session, and considered the agenda items regarding the opening of the session, the adoption of the agenda, the organization of work, and the general debate. Three round tables were held at the 3rd, 4th and 5th meetings, on 14 and 15 June. At its 6th meeting on 15 June, the Conference considered agenda item 5 (c), “Interactive dialogue with the United Nations system on the implementation of the Convention”; item 6, “Decisions by the Conference of States Parties”; 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 is contained in annex II and the list of non-governmental organizations accredited to the Conference is contained in annex III.

II. Opening of the session

4. The session was opened by the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs and temporary President of the Conference.
5. At its 1st meeting, the Conference adopted the provisional agenda (CRPD/CSP/2023/1). Under agenda item 2, the Conference elected the members of the Bureau: Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Tunisia to the United Nations, Tarek Ladeb, President of the Conference, and Deputy Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka, Sugeeshwara Gunaratna, Counsellor of Georgia, Ekaterine Lortkipanidze, third Secretary of Panama, Marilyn del Carmen Thompson Ramírez, and Counsellor of Greece, Tasos Kezas, Vice-Presidents of the Conference.



6. Opening statements were made by the President of the Conference; the Secretary-General of the United Nations; the President of the seventy-seventh session of the General Assembly; the Chair of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Gertrude Oforiwa Fefoame; the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, Gerard Quinn, via video; the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility, María Soledad Cisternas Reyes; a civil society representative of the Arab Organization of Persons with Disabilities of Lebanon, Nawaf Kabbara; and a youth representative from Qatar, Ghanim Al Muftah.

7. Pursuant to rule 25, paragraph 5 (c), of the rules of procedure, and under agenda item 4, 13 new non-governmental organizations were accredited to the Conference (see annex III).

III. Matters related to the implementation of the Convention

A. General debate

8. Under agenda item 5 (a), statements were made by 109 Member States;¹ seven country groups;² and 26 institutions and organizations observing the Conference, comprising 2 international organizations,³ 19 non-governmental organizations,⁴ 3 national human rights institutions⁵ and 2 United Nations entities.⁶ Written statements

¹ Statements were delivered, in chronological order, by: Tunisia, Sri Lanka, Morocco, Canada, Australia, Italy, Latvia, Ireland, France, Malta, Egypt, Qatar, Iceland, Ukraine, Zambia, Zimbabwe, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Sierra Leone, Guyana, Libya, Malaysia, Barbados, Mongolia, Paraguay, Iraq, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Luxembourg, Djibouti, Portugal, Finland, Poland, Lithuania, Japan, China, Singapore, Kazakhstan, Norway, Jordan, Maldives, Russian Federation, Croatia, Namibia, Cyprus, Kyrgyzstan, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Armenia, Argentina, Slovenia, Kenya, Brunei Darussalam, Hungary, Türkiye, Georgia, Spain, Greece, Panama, Chile, Switzerland, Israel, Slovakia, Mexico, Austria, Côte d'Ivoire, Peru, Guatemala, Honduras, Germany, Islamic Republic of Iran, Senegal, Belarus, Colombia, Thailand, Dominican Republic, United Arab Emirates, Malawi, Uruguay, Liberia, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Denmark, Ecuador, Andorra, Philippines, Plurinational State of Bolivia, United Republic of Tanzania, Cuba, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Sweden, Pakistan, Burkina Faso, Azerbaijan, Nicaragua, Yemen, San Marino, Nepal, Kuwait, Czechia, Myanmar, Romania, Angola, Uganda, El Salvador, Syrian Arab Republic, Indonesia, Bulgaria, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Timor-Leste.

² Joint statements were delivered by Australia, on behalf of Mexico, Indonesia, the Republic of Korea, Türkiye and Australia, known as the MIKTA Group; Iceland, on behalf of a cross-regional group of 66 countries; European Union, on behalf of members of the European Union; Malaysia, on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations; New Zealand, on behalf of the Group of Friends of Persons with Disabilities; Oman, on behalf of the Gulf Cooperation Council; and South Africa, on behalf of the United Nations LGBTI Core Group.

³ League of Arab States and Commonwealth.

⁴ The International Disability Alliance, the International Disability and Development Consortium, Inclusion International, the World Federation of the Deaf, the CBM Global Disability Inclusion, the World Federation of the Deafblind, Transforming Communities for Inclusion (Global), Down Syndrome International, the International Federation for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus, the Pacific Disability Forum, the Arab Organization of Disabled Persons, the Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind (Sightsavers), the Disability Federation of Ireland, Inclusion Canada, People with Disability Australia, the Center for the Human Rights of Users and Survivors of Psychiatry, the European Network for Independent Living, the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations, Ltd. (AFDO) and the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment.

⁵ Canadian Human Rights Commission (on behalf of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions), the Office of the Public Defender (Ombudsman) of Georgia and the Australian Human Rights Commission.

⁶ United Nations Office for Project Services and United Nations Children's Fund.

were also received from five States parties as their contributions under this agenda item.⁷

B. Round-table discussions

9. At its 3rd, 4th and 5th meetings, on 14 and 15 June, the Conference held three round tables. At each round table, presentations were given by a panel of speakers, followed by an interactive discussion.

Round table 1

Ensuring equal access to and accessibility of sexual and reproductive health services for persons with disabilities

10. The round-table discussion, under agenda item 5 (b) (i), was co-chaired by the Vice-President of the Conference and Counsellor of the Permanent Mission of Greece, Tasos Kezas, and a civil society representative of the Fiji Disabled People's Federation, Savaira Tinaivunivalu. Presentations were given by five panellists: President of the National Council on Disability and Manager of Inclusion of People with Disabilities of the Office of the Vice-President of Colombia, Anderson Henao; Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility, María Soledad Cisternas Reyes; Global Disability Focal Point and Senior Adviser on gender of the United Nations Population Fund, Leyla Sharafi; Professor and Director of the Disability Research Centre at University College London, Nora Groce; and representative of Ya_All: The Youth Network, Manipur, India, Sadam Hanjabam.

Round table 2

Digital accessibility for persons with disabilities

11. The round-table discussion, under agenda item 5 (b) (ii), was co-chaired by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations and Vice-President of the Conference, Sugeeshwara Gunaratna, and a civil society representative, the Director for Capacity-Building and Advocacy of the Global Initiative for Inclusive Information and Communications Technologies (G3ict), Mohammed Ali Loutfy. Presentations were made by five panellists: a technology analyst from SG Enable in Singapore, Chong Kwek Bin; a senior research fellow with the Faculty of International Relations and Diplomacy at the National University of Public Service in Hungary, László G. Lovászy; the President of the National Accessibility Authority in Greece, Constantinos Stephanidis; the Senior Coordinator for Digital Inclusion, Development Bureau, International Telecommunication Union, Roxana Widmer-Iliescu; and an adviser and board member of the Rwanda Organization of Persons with DeafBlindness, Jean Marie Furaha, via a recorded video message.

Round table 3

Reaching the underrepresented groups of persons with disabilities

12. The round-table discussion, under agenda item 5 (b) (iii), was co-chaired by the Director of the National Secretariat on Disability of Panama, representing Panama as Vice-President of the Conference, Iris González de Valenzuela; and a civil society representative of the Leprosy Mission, Timor-Leste, Ana Ivonia Filipe Vital. Presentations were made by four panellists from both government and civil society: Chair of the China Disabled Persons' Federation, Haidi Zhang; academic lecturer and Secretary of State at the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy of Poland, Pawel Wdowik; Foreign Service Officer at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Nigeria,

⁷ Angola, Bahrain, Ethiopia, India and Belgium.

Christopher Nwanoro; and Executive Director of Women Enabled International, Mexico, Maryangel García Ramos Guadiana.

C. Interactive dialogue with the United Nations system on the implementation of the Convention

13. The Interactive Dialogue, under agenda item 5 (c), was chaired by the President of the Conference. Presentations were given by seven panellists: Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Economic Social Affairs, Li Junhua; Coordinator of the Human Rights and Disability Unit of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Facundo Chávez Penillas; Deputy Executive Director and Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations Population Fund, Diene Keita; Technical Lead (Disability) of the World Health Organization, Darryl Barrett; Senior Coordinator for Digital Inclusion of the International Telecommunication Union, Roxana Widmer-Iliescu; Manager of the Technical Secretariat of the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Ola Abualghaib; and Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana (via video).

14. Presentations were also given by the following representatives of other mandate holders and stakeholders: Chair of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Gertrude Oforiwa Fefoame; Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility, María Soledad Cisternas Reyes; Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, Gerard Quinn (via video); and a civil society representative and President of Transforming Communities for Inclusion, Robinah Alambuya.

IV. Decisions by the Conference of States Parties

15. At its 6th meeting, on 15 June, under agenda item 6, the Conference unanimously adopted three decisions proposed by its Bureau (see annex I).

V. Closure of the session

16. During the closing segment, statements were made by the representatives of Georgia, Greece, Panama and Sri Lanka, in their capacity as Vice-Presidents of the Conference.

17. The President of the Conference, in his closing statement, expressed his appreciation to all States parties, civil society organizations and the Secretariat for their cooperation and support in making the sixteenth session of the Conference a success.

18. The session was adjourned at 6 p.m. on 15 June 2023.

Annex I

Decisions by the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

At its 6th meeting, on 15 June 2023, 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 seventeenth 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 seventeenth session will be held at United Nations Headquarters from 11 to 13 June 2024.

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, including for the accessibility of facilities and services, for the sixteenth session of the Conference, and reiterates its recommendation to the Secretary-General to continue to provide adequate support to the Conference at its seventeenth and future sessions.

Decision 3

Request to the Secretary-General to transmit the report of the sixteenth 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 sixteenth session to all States parties and observers.

Annex II

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

Opening of the Conference

1. In his opening statement, the President of the Conference, Tarek Ladeb, said that international commitments to equality and the empowerment of persons with disabilities had been strengthened since the adoption of the Convention and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Although progress had been made in many countries and by the United Nations, challenges remained and much still needed to be done. To make a difference in the lives of over 1 billion persons with disabilities, an increased appreciation of accessibility and disability inclusion was needed to realize their rights and achieve development for all. He noted that Tunisia was proud to act as the President of the Conference, which was taking place at a critical juncture when the international community was taking actions to build back from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, addressing a myriad of multifaceted challenges that were affecting countries and people and striving to put the Sustainable Development Goals back on track, while leaving no one behind. The Conference offered a prime opportunity to reflect on lessons learned, identify gaps and strengthen policies and practices on the ground, aiming to achieve the full realization of equal rights and the inclusive development of all persons with disabilities throughout the world.

2. The Secretary-General said that the adoption of the Convention marked a landmark moment in a shared journey towards a just and inclusive future for all and had spurred remarkable progress. However, progress was at risk of being overturned, as a cascade of crises were being confronted – from the lingering effects of COVID-19 to the worsening climate emergency, proliferating conflicts, soaring humanitarian needs and a global cost of living crisis. When crises gripped communities, persons with disabilities were often hit first and worst. More must be done, and better, to ensure that the principles of the Convention were made real in people's lives everywhere in all areas, such as digital accessibility, and sexual and reproductive health services – a matter that could mean the difference between life and death for many, especially women with disabilities. Also, full inclusion and active participation of persons with disabilities must be ensured in all their diversity and involving particularly underrepresented groups. The Secretary-General concluded by saying that the United Nations had been making progress in implementing the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy but so far only 30 per cent of the Strategy's benchmarks had been met. Therefore, everyone must pick up the pace and never stop until disability inclusion and accessibility were fully built into every aspect of work, from Headquarters to the field.

3. The President of the General Assembly at its seventy-seventh session, Csaba Kőrösi, recognized that much still needed to be done to translate the provisions of the Convention into real changes on the ground, particularly in terms of access to food, health care, housing, schools, workplaces, justice and public facilities that were key to well-being and essential for a community life. He said that if actions were not stepped up, the 2030 Agenda pledge to leave no one behind would simply not be fulfilled. He highlighted the fact that it was crucial to have the accurate disability data necessary to identify bottlenecks and allocate resources to overcome barriers to inclusion. The President of the General Assembly was committed to supporting societies that were building inclusion and justice. With the approach of the

Sustainable Development Goal Summit, the international community should pay attention to those matters, tackle the roots of marginalization and promote the equal enjoyment of human rights by all, including persons with disabilities.

4. The Chair of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Gertrude Oforiwa Fefoame, appealed to States parties to ensure that the rights of persons with disabilities were addressed in the negotiations for post-2030 development agendas and in the forthcoming Sustainable Development Goal Summit. She raised a concern regarding a number of practices in the field of mental health that were not compliant with the Convention in terms of respecting autonomy or the will and preferences of the persons in question. Concerning sexual and reproductive health, she urged States to prohibit harmful practices such as forced sterilization, emphasized the need to train health professionals to respect the rights of persons with disabilities to make their own choices and decisions regarding their bodies and sexuality and to ensure the accessibility and availability of relevant services, information and facilities. States should provide financial support to persons with disabilities to overcome existing digital gaps and also address multiple and intersectional discrimination by adopting measures such as antidiscrimination legislation, countering stigma and stereotypes and empowering underrepresented groups. She concluded by expressing her hope that the Conference of States Parties and its secretariat would be supported with adequate human, technical and financial resources that would allow physical and online attendance in future sessions.

5. The Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, Gerard Quinn, via video, shared observations that focused on the risks and opportunities posed by artificial intelligence for the inclusion of persons with disabilities. With many personalized services powered by artificial intelligence seemingly within grasp, independent living could become more readily achievable. He warned that attention must be paid to the downside of artificial intelligence technology, saying that artificial intelligence was based on machine learning that largely excluded persons with disabilities and thus perpetuated stereotypes. Furthermore, machine-based decisions could not be made by completely sidestepping the obligation of reasonable accommodation. Disability rights must be a part of how humanity saw its own future and the social fabric of the future must include persons with disabilities as an integral part of the human family. In that regard, civil society and technology developers, users and regulators all had a role to play.

6. The Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility, María Soledad Cisternas Reyes, brought together two topics, namely gender and human rights, that were cross-cutting issues related to the achievement of sustainable development, and made a special reference to women and girls with disabilities in her speech. The Special Envoy said that feminist movements must include women with disabilities in their agendas for social, political and economic equality and also include them in management. She believed that the United Nations gender parity strategy would be more successful if it worked with the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy and when more women with disabilities were working in the United Nations. She paid special attention to persons with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities and called for enhanced efforts in deinstitutionalization, the elimination of forced treatment and the promotion of independent living and inclusion in the community. Regarding digital accessibility, she underscored it was vital to improve the availability and affordability of digital technologies so that they could be used by all. On sexual and reproductive rights, the global community should have a model protocol on maternity for women with disabilities that she would present via video during the 16th session.

7. A civil society representative and the President of the Arab Organization of Persons with Disabilities of Lebanon, Nawaf Kabbara, acknowledged the significant

progress achieved since the previous session. However, he expressed concerns regarding setbacks and obstacles, especially in the implementation of the Convention and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals at the national level. Fiscal constraints were leading to cuts to services that disproportionately impacted persons with disabilities. Implementation of the 2030 Agenda was still not inclusive of persons with disabilities. War and the climate crisis demonstrated how fragile response mechanisms were, as shown in the responses to the earthquakes in the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye. He recognized the need to increase the meaningful involvement of persons with disabilities in intergovernmental processes such as the Summit of the Future and those subsequent to the 2030 Agenda. He called for increased investment and more partnerships with disability organizations including the most marginalized groups.

8. A youth representative from Qatar, Ghanim Muftah, cited the 2022 Fédération Internationale de Football Association World Cup as one of the most successful sport events for people with disabilities, partly owing to accessible infrastructure and enabling technologies. Qatar, the host country, was now addressing ways to create a comprehensive, barrier-free environment in education, employment and the social and cultural sectors. Equality and respect for diversity guided the goal of the advancement of persons with disabilities. Qatar had announced that it was ready to host the next Global Disability Summit in 2028, in collaboration with the International Disability Alliance. The representative invited all Conference participants to attend the 2028 event to witness the commitment and dedication of Qatar to persons with disabilities.

Round-table discussions

Round table 1

Ensuring equal access to and accessibility of sexual and reproductive health services for persons with disabilities

9. The round-table discussion, under agenda item 5 (b) (i), was co-chaired by the Vice-President of the Conference, Tasos Kezas, and a civil society representative from the Fiji Disabled People's Federation, Savaira Tinaivunivalu.

10. In his opening remarks, the Vice-President recognized that the Conference had not previously discussed equal access to and accessibility of sexual and reproductive health and rights for persons with disabilities, who were often excluded owing to environmental and attitudinal barriers and misconceptions about their needs for sexual and reproductive health care. Considered altogether, those factors created a huge gap between political commitment and practices on the ground – a gap that could be overcome, however, when appropriate actions were taken by States in line with the Convention, for example, by putting health equity at the centre of relevant national agendas. States could also adopt, implement and monitor health equity programmes and engage and empower persons with disabilities to participate meaningfully in sexual and reproductive health actions. He called on States to accelerate efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda goals and the Convention.

11. The President of the National Council on Disability and Manager of Inclusion of People with Disabilities of the Office of the Vice-President of Colombia, Anderson Henao, said that sexual and reproductive health was a pertinent issue, as it was linked to autonomy, independent living in the community and the exercise of human rights. Colombia had ratified the Convention in 2011 and had made progress in terms of regulations and laws in three major areas, namely Decree No. 1421 of 2017 (on inclusive education), Decree No. 1904 of 2017 (which stemmed from a 2016 ruling of the Constitutional Court concerning an attempted forced sterilization of a teenage

girl with an intellectual disability) and Decree No. 1996 of 2019 (on the legal capacity of persons with disabilities). Those legal instruments had paved the way for progress, though challenges remained regarding sexual and reproductive health-care services, which were linked to other rights, including the right to education, the right to legal capacity and the right to make decisions in daily life. There was a need for awareness-raising campaigns targeting public servants and health-care professionals and for improving aspects of the family environment that affected the enjoyment of rights. Colombia was ratifying the optional protocol of the Convention and was expanding the guarantee of rights for persons with disabilities. More efforts were needed to reach out to the public, as many were either unaware of Decree No. 1904 or did not understand its benefits.

12. The Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility, María Soledad Cisternas Reyes, presented a model protocol on maternity of women with disabilities. The model was based on the testimony of women with disabilities and was intended to serve as a useful instrument to support countries in promoting access to sexual and reproductive health care and to assist women with disabilities in fulfilling their reproductive rights. The model protocol included background documents that addressed a variety of issues such as the barriers that many women with disabilities had confronted when they received health care when pregnant. The Special Envoy highlighted the need to eliminate mistreatment and violence against pregnant women with disabilities. The protocol also sought to raise awareness of the situation of pregnant women with disabilities, particularly during childbirth and in the postnatal period. In addition, the protocol drew attention to issues such as intersectionality, accessibility and reasonable accommodation; support for decision-making, including psychological support and assistance, among other things, necessary for women to return to work and care for and raise children. Finally, she added that the protocol implied certain legal changes enabling authorities such as ministries in charge of women's rights to play an important role.

13. The Global Disability Focal Point and Senior Adviser on gender of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Leyla Sharafi, stated that despite progress, major challenges remained in equal access to sexual and reproductive health care, as many women and girls with disabilities faced barriers to access. Surveys from five low- and middle-income countries indicated that 29 per cent of births in which the mothers had disabilities were not attended by skilled health workers, and 22 per cent of married women with disabilities had an unmet need for family planning. Women with disabilities also reported experiencing sexual violence at twice the rate of that experienced by women without disabilities. They continued to be subjected to population control policies that stripped away their fundamental rights. Women with disabilities faced more restrictions on their bodily autonomy. The Fund had been making efforts to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights for persons with disabilities, for example, through a global midwifery programme to steadily add the use of sign language in countries such as Kenya and Zambia to strengthen sexual, reproductive, maternal, newborn and adolescent health counselling and maternity health care of women and adolescent girls with hearing and speech impairments. It also supported policy development and implementation in over 70 countries to ensure disability-inclusive and gender-transformative sexual and reproductive health care. She ended by urging all Governments and stakeholders to play their parts to ensure available, accessible and quality sexual and reproductive health services for all.

14. The Director of the Disability Research Centre at University College London, Nora Groce, shared her advice focusing on three key issues. First, a better oversight and enforcement of laws at community and local levels was needed. Government could tie funding, licensing and accreditation to the abilities of professionals to provide quality services. Accountability should be included at the beginning of

discussions and, in that regard, tools such as the question sets of the Washington Group on Disability Statistics, which allowed for much easier monitoring and evaluation, should be used. Second, the twin-track approach had proved to be viable to reach the most marginalized groups. Disability must be included more consistently in all projects and programmes for sexual and reproductive health information or services. Third, to introduce innovative approaches and new technologies, one strategy was to train health counsellors on information about sexual and reproductive health care for persons with disabilities. In addition, an international or United Nations-based central clearing house for such information was necessary. The low technology literacy rate among adults with disabilities was a concern that had to be addressed. Enhanced efforts must be made to improve the educational system so that teachers would be better equipped with knowledge and skills to identify abuse among children with disabilities. Finally, access to sexual and reproductive health for persons with disabilities was a responsibility of every organization that dealt with sexual and reproductive health. In that regard, Governments had a core responsibility.

15. The representative of Ya_All: The Youth Network, Manipur, India, Sadam Hanjabam, testified that in the region where he lived a majority of young gay migrants with disabilities had been historically marginalized. The most unfortunate issues were the misbelief and lack of interventions on the intersections of sexuality and disability where policymakers and the general public failed to acknowledge the autonomy to control one's own bodies, exercise the right to independence or enter companionship or parenthood. Neglecting rights and abilities prevented them from realizing equal access to sexual and reproductive services and limited opportunities for them to enjoy their rights. Stigma surrounding gender identity, sexual orientation, health conditions, class, religion or geographic region greatly affected access to health service and led to discrimination. Institutionalization was a form of discrimination and also of violence that dehumanized the community in the name of recovery. Therefore, he requested Governments to act against "institutional torture" and to focus on integrating services for sexual and reproductive health and psychological support in community settings. The experience gained by Ya_All showed that challenges could be solved through meaningfully engaging young people with disabilities, designing accessible structures and spaces in health-care settings and building capacities and raising awareness about sexual and reproductive health and rights.

16. During the interactive discussion, interventions were made by a member of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Odelia Fitoussi, and various States parties and other entities, including Singapore, Luxembourg, the European Union, Sweden, Canada and the European Disability Forum. The discussions highlighted the fact that accessibility and disability inclusion around sexual and reproductive health could be a matter of life or death for many women and girls with disabilities. To address the existing challenges, Governments and stakeholder partners had roles to play in promoting accessibility, including appropriate technologies such as digital tools, making such technologies more available, combating gender-based violence including online violence and ensuring personal autonomy and the right to have control over one's own body. To achieve these objectives, States should allocate the necessary resources, including funding to bridge the gap in access to health-care services.

Round table 2

Digital accessibility for persons with disabilities

17. The round-table discussion, under agenda item 5 (b) (ii), was co-chaired by Vice-President of the Conference, Sugeeshwara Gunaratna, and a civil society representative, the Director for Capacity-Building and Advocacy of G3ict, Mohammed Ali Loutfy.

18. In his opening remarks, the Vice-President emphasized that the round table offered an opportunity to discuss key issues and challenges that people with disabilities faced in obtaining equal and affordable access to information, communication technologies and systems, including electronic services such as the Internet, government services and education. He encouraged participants to share good practices and strategies to advance the rights of persons with disabilities in digital accessibility and to address the guiding questions outlined in the background paper for the round table.

19. A technology analyst from SG Enable in Singapore, Chong Kwek Bin, highlighted that a frequently reported barrier to assistive technology was affordability, and he addressed the role of national policies and partnerships in supporting persons with disabilities to purchase assistive technology. He gave the example of the development by Singapore of national master plans to make all its high-traffic government websites accessible by 2030. He encouraged States parties to forge partnerships with technology experts to drive digital accessibility. The Government of Singapore had partnered with software developers to find ways to make government services more digitally accessible to persons with disabilities.

20. Senior research fellow with the Faculty of International Relations and Diplomacy at the National University of Public Service in Hungary, Laszlo G. Lovász, touched on the obstacles that persons with disabilities faced when they were incapable of accessing the Internet for education, e-commerce and health services owing to a lack of standardization of web accessibility requirements at the national level. He highlighted the role of intentionally designing websites and artificial intelligence systems to enhance digital accessibility for persons with disabilities. He recalled the international standards on accessibility and urged States parties not to delay in complying with such standards, noting that cooperation with the private sector would allow Governments to access effective technical solutions to achieve accessibility. He closed by emphasizing that public procurement processes needed to incorporate accessibility requirements more urgently.

21. The President of the National Accessibility Authority in Greece, Constantinos Stephanidis, pointed out that many goods and services in crucial sectors such as health care, education, employment and justice had migrated to online platforms, reducing the need to physically visit a public office. However, international and national studies revealed that digital accessibility had not been fully achieved for various reasons, including a lack of full understanding of accessibility requirements and inadequate expertise. Focusing on practical implementation of the laws, he encouraged States parties to analyse their compliance with international accessibility guidelines. He noted that Greece was piloting a national project to consider how methodological and regulatory shortcomings could be overcome practically by June 2025. He concluded by pointing out that future systems empowered by artificial intelligence should be designed by following proactive, human-centred approaches to enhance the inclusivity of persons with disabilities.

22. The Senior Coordinator for Digital Inclusion from the Development Bureau of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Roxana Widmer-Iliescu, highlighted that to achieve digital inclusion, States parties needed to focus on the three key goals namely, ensuring access to technology, affordability of technology and accessibility of technology by design. She highlighted the work by ITU, which had partnered with member States and the private sector to create an equitable environment free from discrimination to enhance digital inclusion. Over 70 tools and digital resources were provided through ITU websites free of charge, in various languages and in digitally accessible formats, as a means to practically enhance digital accessibility. She called upon States to intensify awareness efforts, implement information and communications technology accessible policies and include digital

accessibility requirements in the planning and design of technology in a manner that adapted to the evolving needs of people at different ages. She concluded by highlighting the cross-sectoral impact digital accessibility could bring in education, employment, health care, transportation, financial services, e-commerce, entertainment and media.

23. The adviser to and board member of the Rwanda Organization of Persons with DeafBlindness, Jean Marie Furaha, said that digital accessibility for persons with deafblindness enabled realization of their rights to education, work, health and political participation. Digital accessibility offered a great potential to alleviate poverty where there was increased participation and contribution by persons with disabilities. He brought attention to the challenges of the poor implementation of policies at the national level that were related to the affordability of assistive technology devices, especially in education and employment. He called upon States parties to ensure that government online services were accessible to persons with deafblindness. He closed by emphasizing the role of States in fostering cooperation, exchanging information and partnering with the private sector to facilitate research, transfer of technologies and funding that would help to achieve digital accessibility for all.

24. During the interactive discussion, interventions were made by various States parties and other entities, including Morocco, Japan, Ecuador, Iraq, the European Union, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Egypt, Guyana, Mexico, Türkiye, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Africa, Malta and Malaysia, and by civil society representatives of AtScale Global Partnership for Assistive Technology, the World Blind Union and the European Disability Forum. The discussion centred around the role of Governments and key partners in ensuring affordability, accessible design, technological training, government services and emerging artificial intelligence systems to achieve digital accessibility for persons with disabilities.

Round table 3

Reaching the underrepresented groups of persons with disabilities

25. The round-table discussion was co-chaired by the Director of the National Secretariat on Disability, Iris González de Valenzuela, representing Panama as Vice-President of the Conference, and a civil society representative of the Leprosy Mission, Timor-Leste, Ana Ivonia Filipe Vital. In her opening remarks, the Director highlighted the importance of increasing the visibility of marginalized groups of persons with disabilities in the realm of politics, policy and decision-making, noting that a major obstacle to achieving that goal was discrimination and the perpetuation of stereotypes against persons with disabilities.

26. The Chair of the China Disabled Persons' Federation, Haidi Zhang, underlined the unique challenges faced by various groups of persons with disabilities in achieving representation and inclusion in decision-making processes, including in organizations that represented persons with disabilities. She noted that persons with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities were acutely affected by underrepresentation. She set out the steps that had been taken in China to support and promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities, particularly women with disabilities and persons with disabilities living in rural areas, stressing the importance of access to rehabilitation services. She concluded her presentation with a call to action to ensure the full and effective implementation of the provisions of the Convention, share and exchange knowledge and establish cooperation among States parties, and establish a global world disability organization, within the United Nations system.

27. An academic lecturer and Secretary of State at the Polish Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy, Pawel Wdowik, highlighted the need to include the perspectives of persons with disabilities who were refugees, because of their heightened risk of experiencing social exclusion. Referring to the situation of refugees with disabilities from Ukraine who had fled to Poland, he described the measures taken by his Government to support them. Recalling the extreme diversity of the disability community, he noted the cross-cutting nature of discrimination against some subgroups of persons with disabilities, particularly persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities, women with disabilities, the unemployed, the homeless and those suffering from substance abuse, who were at a greater risk of social, professional and educational exclusion. He concluded by emphasizing the obligation of States to guarantee the conditions necessary for all persons with disabilities to live independently, with autonomy and dignity, so that they could exercise their right to make decisions about their lives on an equal basis with others.

28. A Foreign Service Officer at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Nigeria, Christopher Nwanoro, began his presentation with an overview of the initiatives and measures of the Government of Nigeria to implement the Convention since it had ratified it in 2017, with an emphasis on independent living, education and vocational training, and accessibility. He shared an example of good practice in vocational training for persons with disabilities, in particular women with disabilities, in the agricultural sector. One milestone had been the establishment of the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities, which oversaw the development and implementation of programmes at various levels, focusing on combating discrimination, stigma and stereotypes, particularly at the community level and in rural areas. He emphasized the importance of awareness-raising across society and the vital role of organizations of persons with disabilities. He concluded by noting challenges related to access to assistive technologies, discrimination against women and girls with disabilities and the inclusion of persons with disabilities in decision-making processes at all levels.

29. The Executive Director of Women Enabled International, Mexico, Maryangel García Ramos Guadiana, discussed intersecting forms of discrimination experienced by persons with disabilities and how their unique lived experiences must inform policy. She highlighted the importance of civil society movements, with a focus on the growth of movements initiated and led by women with disabilities and gender-diverse persons with disabilities, providing good examples at both the local level in Mexico and at the global level. She discussed the role of leaders of persons with disabilities who were actively implementing and utilizing intersectionality as a tool to foster the representation of persons with disabilities, underlining the importance of recognizing the diversity among the community of persons with disabilities, who included groups who had been historically discriminated against and marginalized (women and girls, Indigenous peoples, among others). She ended by emphasizing the power in the diversity of voices and experiences and the responsibility of States parties to actively include them in the implementation of the rights under the Convention.

30. In the interactive discussion, statements were made by representatives of Egypt, Singapore (youth delegate), Türkiye, South Africa, New Zealand, Guyana, Sweden, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Syrian Arab Republic, Malta, Pakistan, Qatar, Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion, Down Syndrome Australia and the National Human Rights Commission of India, all of whom shared good practices and initiatives taken to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities, including in political and electoral processes; discussed improved disability-disaggregated data; highlighted the need for deinstitutionalization; and called for the establishment of a United Nations entity dedicated to disability issues.

Interactive dialogue with the United Nations system on the implementation of the Convention

Part 1

United Nations entities

31. The President of the Conference opened the dialogue by noting that the session was taking place at a critical moment in the Conference's history and that United Nations entities had been playing an important role supporting States parties in their endeavour to implement the Convention and the 2030 Agenda.

32. In his presentation the Under-Secretary-General of the Department for Economic and Social Affairs, Li Junhua, delineated the activities undertaken by the Department to mainstream disability across its work. As the focal point on disability issues within the United Nations system, the Department worked to promote disability inclusion in key intergovernmental processes, through among other things its joint leadership and multiple coordination roles, including in the Inter-Agency Support Group on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Interdepartmental Task Force on Accessibility. The Department had accumulated substantial expertise and know-how in supporting Member States to achieve disability-inclusive development. For example, it had conducted two studies on the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in risks and humanitarian emergencies and on promotion of easy-to-understand communication for accessibility, both with the aim of informing the seventy-eighth session of the General Assembly. The Department was updating the "Disability and Development Report" to reflect progress towards implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals for persons with disabilities, scheduled to be released in 2023.

33. The Coordinator of the Human Rights and Disability Unit of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Facundo Chávez Penillas, stated that the political declaration, co-facilitated by Ireland and Qatar, which would be adopted at the Sustainable Development Goal Summit, should include and reflect the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of sustainable development, to ensure their full realization and protection when dealing with the threats of the moment and when preparing for the future. He noted the need to transform the care economy – including both health and social care models – as a means to uphold the rights of persons with disabilities. In this regard, he mentioned that the High Commissioner for Human Rights had called on States to establish human rights-based, disability-inclusive, gender-responsive and age-sensitive care and support systems at the national level as a lever for sustainable development. Looking ahead to the Summit of the Future, to be held in 2024, he expressed his hope that it would lead to concrete solutions to the challenges that persons with disabilities faced and reinvigorate human rights-based multilateralism.

34. The Deputy Executive Director and Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Diene Keita, said that UNFPA welcomed the themes chosen for the sixteenth session and discussed them from the perspective of the Fund's work. She said that out of 160 countries that prohibited domestic violence in their laws, only 17 had established accessible services for women and girls with disabilities who had suffered from domestic or gender-based violence. She highlighted the engagement of UNFPA with the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and said that the rights of persons with disabilities must be at the heart of development. The Fund had a disability inclusion strategy that it was implementing and was achieving up to 75 per cent of the strategy's indicators. By way of example, she mentioned some initiatives launched by UNFPA that promoted the mainstreaming of disability, such as the global flagship disability

programme “We Decide” and Sehetna, an application for mobile telephones that provided information on sexual and reproductive services to young people with disabilities in the Arab region.

35. The Technical Lead (Disability) of the World Health Organization (WHO), Darryl Barrett, drawing on the findings of the recent WHO Global report on Health Equity for Persons with Disabilities, noted that persons with disabilities experienced health inequities. For example, many persons with disabilities died as many as 20 years earlier than their peers without disabilities. Inequities stemmed from barriers related to inaccessibility, stigma, poor access to health care, exclusion from education or employment and poverty. He said that those inequities should be addressed so that the global population of 1.3 billion persons with disabilities could enjoy their right to the highest attainable standard of health and to achieve the three global health priorities of advancing universal health coverage, promoting better health and well-being of the population and protecting people during health emergencies. Transforming health systems was key to achieving those goals, as well as Sustainable Development Goal 3 and other Goals. The WHO report included a list of 40 recommendations around which WHO was developing a guide for action.

36. The Senior Coordinator for Digital Inclusion of the Development Bureau of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Roxana Widmer-Iliescu, described ITU activities across more than 60 countries, including developing guidelines and toolkits, providing training and sharing good practices, as well as awareness-raising and the dissemination of tools and resources to support States parties’ implementation of the Convention in the realm of digital accessibility. She presented joint initiatives between ITU and other United Nations entities, such as a guidebook on accessibility of online job application and recruitment systems (with the International Labour Organization), and the ITU-WHO global standard for accessibility of telehealth services. She also indicated that a new report entitled “A framework for the future of broadcasting” will be launched and that there would be continued improvements to ITU web pages in compliance with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1 and AA standard.

37. The Manager of the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Ola Abualghaib, reported that since 2012 the Partnership’s Fund had supported 94 joint programmes in 87 countries, reaching over 333 million persons with disabilities through inclusive laws and policies, capacity-building, engagement with organizations of persons with disabilities and government bodies. She noted that the increasing momentum of States parties to implement the Convention required additional resources. Nevertheless, progress on translating the obligations under the Convention into concrete actions had been slow, particularly in the light of the crises and shocks of the previous few years which had disproportionately affected persons with disabilities. To counteract that, all stakeholders must work together and needed to redouble their efforts to achieve the full realization of the Convention through collective action.

38. The Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, via video, summarized the Commission’s work on disability over the past 30 years. The work had first focused on the shift away from medicalized and charity-based models of disability towards a rights-based approach. The previous decade had focused on making the rights of persons with disabilities a reality in Asia and the Pacific through the adoption of the Incheon Strategy to “Make the Right Real” for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific, in which Member States are called on to accelerate the ratification and implementation of the Convention. The Commission had recently issued a report on the harmonization of national laws with the Convention that provided an overview of trends in Asia and the Pacific, and the results of a survey to

assess the current state of disability and inclusive development. Given the fact that more still needed to be done, Member States had launched the Jakarta Declaration on the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2023–2032, highlighting six areas for strategic investments to accelerate action to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities and ensure progress in order to “make the right real” for persons with disabilities in the Asia-Pacific region.

39. In the interactive segment of the discussion, interventions were made by representatives of Ecuador, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Morocco, the Philippines, Namibia and Guyana.

Part 2

Mandate and other stakeholders

40. The Chair of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Gertrude Oforiwa Fefoame, shared highlights of the Committee’s work over the previous year. Notably, the Committee had adopted general comment No. 8 (2022) on the right of persons with disabilities to work and employment and was developing guidelines on deinstitutionalization (CRPD/C/5) and had established a working group tasked with developing a general comment on article 11 on situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies. In relation to sustainable development, the Committee was collaborating with other human rights treaty bodies, United Nations agencies and national human rights institutions and civil society. She also mentioned specific challenges faced by the Committee relating to insufficient resources for accessibility and reasonable accommodations, to virtual participation in meetings and to the shortage of funds for producing easy to understand documents.

41. The Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility, María Soledad Cisternas Reyes, reviewed the major achievements during her mandate. She had produced guidelines on inclusive education and motherhood and informative videos on those issues and also on children and adolescents with disabilities and the right to education and access to justice. Another noteworthy achievement were the guidelines on universal and quality digital accessibility. Furthermore, eight awareness-raising campaigns had been conducted. She encouraged Member States and other stakeholders to disseminate and use those resources. She welcomed the political statements made on the need to implement the United Nations system-wide strategy on gender parity and emphasized the importance of ensuring women with disabilities were included on the staff of the United Nations. She closed by mentioning that over the previous year alone, she had participated in over 600 meetings, conversations and virtual meetings related to the advancement of the rights of persons with disabilities.

42. Civil society representative and President of Transforming Communities for Inclusion, Robinah Alambuya, said that she was an African woman with a psychosocial disability, stressing that laws and practice frequently failed to recognize the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination faced by persons with disabilities. She welcomed the Committee’s development of the guidelines on deinstitutionalization and overall progress made in the implementation of the Convention. Nevertheless, many persons with disabilities continued to face gaps, particularly in the area of mental health. Also, progress remained fragile, particularly in the context of the 2030 Agenda and the upcoming Summit of the Future, and she stressed the need for greater and better disability inclusion. She concluded by calling for an intersectional approach to disability inclusion, with better disability data, dedicated funding and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities.

43. The Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, Gerard Quinn, focused his video presentation on reaching the underrepresented groups of persons

with disabilities and on how to ensure that their voices were heard. He noted the importance of moving towards a more situational conception by looking at exclusionary processes in a variety of domains. He provided examples focusing on persons with disabilities who were institutionalized and refugees and internally displaced persons, and the lack of opportunity for them to build alliances in civil society. He closed his remarks by linking the advancement of disability rights with the advancement of democracy and urged all States and stakeholders to consider that link as they worked towards implementing the rights enshrined in the Convention and redressing the legacy of exclusion and invisibility affecting persons with disabilities in many different domains.

Closure of the session

44. Under agenda item 7, statements were made by the representatives of Georgia, Greece, Panama and Sri Lanka, in their capacity as Vice-Presidents of the Conference. They underscored that ratification of the Convention had marked a crucial turning point when a State had committed itself to building an inclusive and fair society for all, including persons with disabilities. Noting the gaps between policies and practices in areas such as sexual and reproductive health, digital accessibility and the social marginalization of underrepresented groups of persons with disabilities, they called for States parties, civil society and the United Nations to pool their knowledge in order to take stock of the innovative ideas proposed during the three days of deliberations and to take them back to their capitals and countries, where groundwork needed to be done to make a difference that would enable all persons with disabilities to participate as equal partners and dignified human beings in societies.

45. In his closing remarks, the President of the Conference stated that the sixteenth session truly had demonstrated the renewed energy and engagement among all States parties, United Nations system entities and civil society. The session had served as a reminder of the fundamental importance of the Convention and the need to continue to advance towards the full exercise of the rights of persons with disabilities. Milestones had been achieved in the three thematic round-table discussions, offering a path for further progress in future sessions towards the full inclusion and empowerment of all persons with disabilities across the globe.

46. The President extended his thanks to the Vice-Presidents for their close cooperation throughout the session in planning and chairing different meetings. He also expressed his sincere appreciation to civil society and all national delegations for their active participation and important contributions.

47. Lastly, the President expressed his appreciation to the Secretariat and partners across and beyond the United Nations who had provided sign language interpretation, closed captioning, accessible documentation and many other services and support that collectively had helped to make the Conference a success.

48. The President closed the session at 6 p.m. on 15 June 2023.

Annex III

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

1. World Institute on Disability
 2. Down Syndrome Association of NSW
 3. Nicole Llunga Foundation
 4. Kallpoosh Foundation
 5. National Down Syndrome Society
 6. Joyful Home International
 7. The Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies
 8. Na Laga'at
 9. Eswatini Comprehensive Disability Mainstreaming Initiative (ECDMI)
 10. National Indigenous Disabled Women Association Nepal
 11. Abilis Foundation
 12. Lotus Center for Rights Research
 13. Munster Technological University (MTU)
-