



Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

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

Twelfth session

New York, 11–13 June 2019

Summary record of the 1st meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 11 June 2019, at 10 a.m.

Temporary President: Mr. Liu Zhenmin (Under-Secretary-General for
Economic and Social Affairs)

President: Mr. Gallegos Chiriboga (Ecuador)

later: Mr. Kemayah, Sr. (Vice-President) (Liberia)

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(a) General debate

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 1: Opening of the twelfth session of the Conference of States Parties

1. **The Temporary President**, speaking as representative of the Secretary-General, declared open the Conference of States Parties.

Agenda item 3: Adoption of the agenda (CRPD/CSP/2019/1)

2. *The agenda was adopted.*

Agenda item 2: Election of officers

3. *Mr. Gallegos Chiriboga (Ecuador) was elected President of the Conference by acclamation. Mr. Salovaara (Finland), Ms. Bogyay (Hungary), Mr. Kemayah, Sr. (Liberia) and Ms. Ali (Singapore) were elected Vice-Presidents by acclamation.*

4. *Mr. Gallegos Chiriboga (Ecuador) took the Chair.*

Agenda item 4: Organization of work

Accreditation and registration of non-governmental organizations

5. **The President** drew attention to the list of non-governmental organizations requesting accreditation to the Conference circulated to States parties by the Secretariat on 2 May 2019. He said he took it that the States parties wished to accede to those requests.

6. *It was so decided.*

Opening remarks

7. **The President** said that the Conference was one of the largest and most important global forums on the rights of persons with disabilities. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which now had 177 signatories, had had more initial signatories than any other human rights convention. The Convention was also the first human rights convention open to signature by regional integration organizations. Its entry into force in 2008 had marked the culmination of decades of work to change attitudes towards persons with disabilities, who were now rights-holders with the power to make decisions about their lives on the basis of free and informed consent and participate as active members of society.

8. The twelfth Conference of States Parties would provide an opportunity for participants to discuss their common objectives of ensuring full implementation of the Convention, promoting human rights and establishing an inclusive and sustainable world. More

than 1,500 participants, representing approximately 180 State parties and observers, 100 non-governmental organizations and dozens of United Nations bodies, had come together to reflect on their experiences and lessons learned and identify remaining shortcomings in order to improve implementation of the Convention. The session would be broadcast electronically to an additional 6 million persons.

9. In light of the current efforts of the international community to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the overarching theme chosen for the current session was “Ensuring inclusion of persons with disabilities in a changing world through the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities”. The sub-themes, which would be considered during three round-table discussions, were technology, digitalization and information and communications technology for the empowerment and inclusion of persons with disabilities; social inclusion and the right to the highest attainable standard of health; and the inclusion of persons with disabilities in society through participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport. The cross-cutting theme of the session was awareness-raising. Those themes encompassed a wide range of elements that would have a direct impact on societies’ responses to the legitimate demands of persons with disabilities. They had been selected by the Bureau through an open and transparent process that had involved close consultation with Member States, the United Nations system, civil society and, in particular, persons with disabilities and their representative organizations.

10. The Convention could not be implemented unless the voices of the most vulnerable and marginalized were heard and taken into consideration in all decision-making processes, in accordance with the principle of “nothing about us without us”. Joint action was needed to enhance inclusion, solidarity and equality and build societies that were free from discrimination and from barriers to the enjoyment of rights by persons with disabilities. The multilateral arena provided an appropriate space for such efforts.

11. Speaking in his national capacity, he said that Ecuador had played a significant role in the promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities. He had personally chaired the working group that had drafted the Convention, and the topic was a priority for the President and the First Lady. All States should follow his country’s example by making the rights of persons with disabilities a priority, in particular since the phenomenon of ageing populations meant that an increasing number of persons would acquire a disability at some point in their lives.

12. **The Secretary-General** said that a few weeks previously, a remarkable young woman named Nujeen Mustafa, a twenty-year-old refugee from Aleppo, had come to the United Nations to share her story with the Security Council. Ms. Mustafa happened to have cerebral palsy and used a wheelchair. She had movingly described her life as a young woman with a disability in the midst of war, recounting the difficulties, the challenges and her constant fear that her disability might cause her family to be seconds too late when attempting to flee a bombing.

13. Ms. Mustafa's message had been clear. As she had put it, "the phrase 'no one left behind' should not just be words that you say. You can and should do more to ensure that people with disabilities are included in all aspects of your work. We cannot wait any longer." That sentiment had been reflected in his most recent report on the protection of civilians, which explicitly highlighted the situation of persons with disabilities, in what was the first such reference in more than a decade.

14. Ms. Mustafa's words also echoed in his mind at the commencement of the twelfth session of the Conference of States Parties. He wanted to express his deepest gratitude to those present for all that they did to advance the rights of persons with disabilities across the agenda and around the world. Their work was vital, not just for persons with disabilities but for all people.

15. Disability inclusion was a fundamental human right, and fighting to secure that right moved the world closer to upholding the core values and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. Disability inclusion was also central to the promise of the 2030 Agenda. When biases and obstacles to opportunities for persons with disabilities were removed, the whole world benefitted. The International Labour Organization had found that excluding people with disabilities from the world of work could rob countries of as much as 7 per cent of their gross domestic product. Realizing the rights of persons with disabilities was a matter of justice as well as a common-sense investment in a common future. That was clear to all participants in the session, including the President, who had led the process of drafting the Convention, and the 177 State parties – nine out of ten States Members of the United Nations – that had ratified the Convention. However, it was also apparent to all that there was a long way to go in changing mindsets, laws and policies to ensure that persons with disabilities around the world could exercise their rights, have opportunities and live in dignity.

16. Participants had come together to take action to make the goals and the objectives of the Convention a

reality on the ground; promote stronger collaboration among Member States, the United Nations system, civil society organizations, in particular organizations of persons with disabilities, the private sector and academic institutions; and transform society and development by making them inclusive, accessible and sustainable for all. Much work remained to be done with regard to that crucial effort. In December 2018, he had issued the first United Nations flagship report on disability and development, which highlighted the core challenges: disproportionate levels of poverty, a lack of access to education, health services and employment, and the under-representation of persons with disabilities in decision-making processes and political participation. Much more must be done to address discrimination and exclusion, in particular against girls and women with disabilities; ensure that schools, health care and health services, the workplace, leisure and recreational activities, sports, and all other areas of life were fully accessible; and improve transportation, infrastructure and information and communications technology to make cities, rural areas, and societies inclusive. The destination was clear: a world in which all persons, including those with disabilities, could enjoy equal opportunities, have a full say in decision-making processes and truly benefit from economic, social, political and cultural life. He urged all actors, in particular States parties to the Convention and their international partners, to be more ambitious in the fulfilment of their commitment to ensure the realization of the rights of all persons with disabilities.

17. The United Nations must lead by example in all those efforts. Early in his tenure, he had commissioned a comprehensive review of the Organization's performance with regard to disability inclusion. Frankly, it had not been a pretty picture. While there had been some examples of good practices, the review had shed light on major gaps across all areas of the Organization's work, from Headquarters to the country level. The review had also revealed a lack of understanding and a lack of systemic approaches to ensuring that the United Nations fulfilled its responsibilities. There was an unevenness in the Organization's approach, including in its use of existing tools and mechanisms and in its strategies, and even in awareness of core policies.

18. Those challenges should be confronted head on. He was therefore pleased to announce the launch of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy. The strategy was not a strategy of words, but of action to raise the standard of the Organization's performance on disability inclusion across the board and bring about the unified and transformative change that was needed. He had insisted that an accountability framework be

developed to monitor progress and ensure that challenges and gaps were addressed, not only at Headquarters but also in the field. Clear benchmarks had been established and there was a focus on critical areas, including leadership, strategic planning, accessibility, participation, programming and procurement. A call had also been made to increase the number of persons with disabilities working for the United Nations and for the Organization to provide better support for such persons. He wanted the United Nations to be an employer of choice for persons with disabilities. He also wanted the Organization's humanitarian, development and peace operations to fully recognize and advance the rights of persons with disabilities. Lastly, he wanted the United Nations to be fully accessible for one and all. The United Nations could no longer be a platform for change if persons with disabilities could not access that platform to speak. He was counting on strong support from Member States in moving forward with the Strategy, and on persons with disabilities and their representative organizations to ensure that the entire United Nations family kept the promise of the Strategy.

19. Together, it would be possible to raise awareness and remove barriers; work with persons with disabilities as agents of change to build an inclusive, accessible and sustainable world; and create the conditions necessary for the realization of the simple dream that young Nujeen Mustafa had shared with the Security Council. "My hope," she had said, "is that people with disabilities, particularly women and girls, one day live in a world that protects, respects and values us." Every person should expect nothing less, and the United Nations had a duty to deliver on that expectation.

20. **Mr. Buntan** (Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) said that the Convention ensured that persons with disabilities – as rights holders, equal participants in society, human rights defenders and participants in all spheres of life – could play a significant role in moving a changing world in the right direction. Concerted action had recently led to a number of important changes. The efforts of the Committee and organizations of persons with disabilities had led to the appointment of six women to the Committee in 2018, which represented a significant step towards achieving gender parity. In that connection, it should be recalled that equality between men and women was a principle enshrined in the Convention, and States parties were required to ensure the development, advancement and empowerment of women with disabilities.

21. Initiatives and advocacy efforts by many participants in the Conference had contributed to the growing recognition within the United Nations system

that it needed to do more for persons with disabilities. He commended the commitment of the Secretary-General to ensuring accessibility and mainstreaming the rights of persons with disabilities through the Disability Inclusion Strategy. A systematic approach to guaranteeing the rights of persons with disabilities in all operations and programmes and ensuring that such persons could participate on an equal footing with others was sure to change the world by leading by example. Issues such as access arrangements for Conference sessions were relevant in that regard.

22. Persons with disabilities still faced significant barriers to participation in society, but the Convention had enormous potential to change attitudes, environments and lives. The message of general comment No. 7 (2018), was clear: the effective and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities, through their representative organizations, was at the heart of the Convention. The active and informed participation of all persons in decisions that affected their lives and rights was consistent with the human rights-based approach to public decision-making processes and ensured good governance and social accountability.

23. Despite repeated appeals by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to the Secretary-General and the Bureau of the Conference of States Parties, the issue of funding for the travel of a Committee representative to the sessions of the Conference had not been resolved. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights had funded the travel of the Chair, and sometimes also the Vice-Chair, on an ad hoc basis for many years but had not been able to do so in 2019, prompting the National Human Rights Commission of Korea to step in. In light of the unsustainability of the current situation, he reiterated his call for the United Nations to fund the travel of the Chair.

24. The cash flow problems of the United Nations announced in April 2019 also gave cause for concern. The shortages would result in the cancellation of sessions of six of the treaty bodies, which would seriously undermine the system of protections that Member States had spent decades establishing. The Chairs of all ten treaty bodies had sent a letter to the Secretary-General to request that he work with Member States to address the situation as a matter of urgency. He concluded by reiterating the importance of the principle of "nothing about us without us".

25. **Ms. Devandas Aguilar** (Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities) said that persons with disabilities were disproportionately affected by the

environmental crisis, demographic changes, scientific and technological innovations and political, economic and social changes that were creating a rapidly changing world. Work on disability issues must not be relegated to the margins of efforts to address the enormous challenges that humanity was facing. As stated in the Convention, the ability of persons with disabilities to enjoy their rights was closely linked to the realities of the environments and communities in which they lived. The Sustainable Development Goals provided an important framework of indicators that could be used to improve the lives of all persons, and persons with disabilities were doing their utmost to participate in sustainable development efforts. However, progress to date was insufficient and persons with disabilities were given low priority by States and the international community, including the United Nations.

26. The ambitious and far-reaching United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy could be a turning point in terms of the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all areas of the Organization's work. However, the adoption of the Strategy was merely the starting point of the long implementation process that would be required to bring about the full and sustainable inclusion of persons with disabilities. She therefore called on Member States to strengthen the capacities of the United Nations system by providing political and financial support for the implementation of the Strategy, which would result in enhanced support for national efforts to protect the rights of persons with disabilities. It was essential to ensure that persons with disabilities were consulted and involved in the implementation of the Strategy. The United Nations, Member States and persons with disabilities must work together to guarantee the rights of persons with disabilities in a constantly changing world.

27. **Ms. Cisternas Reyes** (Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility) said that she fully supported the comments made by the Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities concerning the need to strengthen the functioning of the treaty bodies. Accessibility was a cross-cutting legal concept in terms of human rights in the twenty-first century and was a legally recognized right under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Under Sustainable Development Goal 11, on making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, there were two targets that specifically referred to accessibility in relation to transport and green spaces in cities. As the monitoring mechanism for sustainable development, the high-level political forum on sustainable development should make a greater effort to ensure that States were working

towards universal accessibility. Since accessibility was a fundamental pillar of human rights, it should be an element of all the Sustainable Development Goals. A lack of accessibility contributed to poverty and therefore ran counter to Sustainable Development Goal 1 and constituted structural abuse.

28. Within the context of smart cities, all technology must be fully accessible to users to avoid any increase in the digital divide or the creation of additional barriers. Only by taking into account accessibility and capacity-building for persons with disabilities would a smart city truly live up to its name. She encouraged States parties, municipalities and civil society to participate in the Cities for All initiative of World Enabled, with a view to fulfilling the objective of accessibility together.

29. According to the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, businesses must implement internal policies that took into account human rights, and by extension sustainable development, including accessibility policies. Such policy commitments would lead to closer consideration of the rights of persons with disabilities. For example, with regard to Sustainable Development Goal 12 on ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns, businesses would have to ensure that production was also accessible. Businesses should also play a leadership role in sustainable development by investing in accessibility in communities, which would produce a yield for businesses by promoting the good health and well-being of consumers, in accordance with Sustainable Development Goal 3.

30. The Conference had the power to highlight the importance of having the high-level political forum monitor accessibility and promote participatory and inclusive planning and management of the development of cities and other human settlements. Increasing accessibility at the United Nations was also necessary. The sub-themes of the current session – health, participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport, and technology – were all guided by the objective of achieving accessibility. With regard to health, it should be noted that while the draft declaration of the high-level meeting on universal health coverage to be held in September 2019 included references to persons with disabilities, it regrettably did not mention accessibility. It was crucial to elevate accessibility to the status of a main principle of universal health coverage, in order to ensure that quality health care was provided to all and that no one was left behind, in line with the 2030 Agenda.

31. **Ms. Arellano** (Observer for the International Disability Alliance) said that the disability movement, which represented over 1 billion people, was united in working towards a shift from words to action. Significant progress had been made recently in the promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities. The first Global Disability Summit had been held in London in July 2018, with a follow-up in Argentina in June 2019; the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy had been created; and the situation of persons with disabilities had been included in Security Council deliberations for the first time in December 2018. Such developments would lead to a demand for the involvement of organizations of persons with disabilities all levels. Strategies were therefore needed to enable those organizations to meet that demand and serve as partners to other stakeholders, including the United Nations and Member States, in the delivery of their commitments.

32. There were still a number of setbacks and obstacles with regard to the implementation of the Convention and the Sustainable Development Goals at the national level. For example, the fiscal space for the provision of services to persons with disabilities was being cut, implementation of the 2030 Agenda was still not inclusive of persons with disabilities, and the debate on mental health failed to take a human rights-based approach or to include persons with psychosocial disabilities.

33. The previous day, representatives from organizations of persons with disabilities, civil society, Governments, multilateral organizations and the private sector had met to discuss such obstacles and consider ways in which organizations of persons with disabilities could contribute to future efforts. They wished to convey that, collectively, they recognized the need to increase the meaningful involvement of persons with disabilities and their organizations in all decision-making processes. They called for increased investment in and partnership with diverse organizations of persons with disabilities, particularly those representing the most marginalized groups, including through peer mentorship at the grass-roots level, and for investment in capacity-building for all stakeholders to help them implement the Convention and ensure that persons with disabilities were taken into account in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. They recognized the existence of successful capacity-building programmes and called for such initiatives to receive additional support and be more readily available. They also called for actions to be taken to build the capacities of youth with disabilities and increase their engagement with forums such as the Conference. They recognized

the right of every child with a disability to grow up in the community on an equal basis with other children. Lastly, they recognized the role of the family and noted that institutionalization remained one of the major concerns with regard to the future of children with disabilities.

34. The Global Disability Summit had generated a new wave of promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities, which had resulted in both an opportunity and a responsibility to mobilize commitments to change and to work towards full enjoyment of the rights of persons with disabilities.

35. *A short video was shown, in which children and adolescents with disabilities from around the world read out ten principles for their protection, well-being and development.*

36. *Mr. Kemayah, Sr. (Liberia) took the Chair.*

Agenda item 5: Matters related to the implementation of the Convention

(a) General debate

37. **Ms. Michetti** (Argentina) said that inclusion could be achieved through international cooperation. Argentina had recently demonstrated that the consultation and participation of civil society in the process of formulating public policies was a feasible approach. The office of national statistics had compiled, in accordance with the standards set by the Washington Group on Disability Statistics, valuable information on the numbers, characteristics and geographical distribution of persons with disabilities in the country and published the results in an easy-read format.

38. The cross-cutting theme of the twelfth session of the Conference, awareness-raising, was intended to reinforce efforts towards the total elimination of discrimination in all its forms. As set out in article 8 of the Convention, awareness-raising was the first step towards changing attitudes to persons with disabilities. Parties to the Convention were responsible for ensuring that conversations took place on the rights of such persons within their communities. To that end, Argentina had established a media channel that aimed to combat the stigmatization of persons with disabilities by emphasizing their potential rather than their limitations. The opportunities available to persons with disabilities must allow them to fulfil their potential. The Conference and the Global Disability Summit should be forums for promoting the placement of human rights at the heart of public policies. Public servants had a responsibility to establish conditions that ensured that persons with

disabilities were never again marginalized by policies at the national, regional or international level.

39. **Ms. González Navas** (Ecuador) said that both physical and attitudinal barriers must be addressed when tackling the challenges faced by persons with disabilities and ensuring their full participation in society. As the president of the “Toda una vida” plan and the wife of a person with a disability, she had witnessed the progression towards guaranteed rights for persons with disabilities that had been achieved through commitment to the mandate of the Convention and the principle of “nothing about us without us”. In a changing world, States had a responsibility to establish conditions and spaces to allow persons with disabilities full enjoyment of their rights.

40. The achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals could only be maintained by building inclusive societies. In that connection, the 2030 Agenda provided a framework for the creation of numerous mechanisms for inclusion, in order to guarantee equal rights for persons with disabilities. Information and communications technology must also be harnessed to empower such persons and there must be ongoing efforts to raise awareness of their rights.

41. Two years previously, her Government had established the “Toda una vida” plan, which aimed to provide comprehensive support to the most vulnerable groups, giving priority to persons with disabilities and their families. The “Misión Las Manuelas” subprogramme involved providing them with technical support, while the “Casas para todos” subprogramme concerned the construction of sustainable social housing estates, built in accordance with accessibility and universal design standards, to provide decent housing for persons with disabilities. Such projects were designed to provide safe spaces where entrepreneurship, training, meetings and community participation could take place. It was only through collective, steadfast efforts, guided by persons with disabilities and their representative organizations, that the commitments under the Convention could be fully realized through public policies and concrete programmes.

42. **Mr. Tan** (Singapore) said that his delegation was committed to building an inclusive society where persons with disabilities were recognized, empowered and given every opportunity to be full and contributing members of society. Every five years, Singapore reviewed its national road map for disability-related policies and initiatives and its implementation of the Convention, keeping efforts relevant to the current context and anticipating any upcoming challenges. Notable progress had been made in the areas of early

detection and intervention, education, training and employment, transportation and assistive technology. Persons with disabilities had become more active in their communities, aided by initiatives related to sports and the arts, and social barriers to inclusion were being broken down through public education campaigns. Efforts were being made to support persons with disabilities and their caregivers across all stages of their lives.

43. His Government would continue to work closely with community partners to develop more coordinated and targeted support. Its current focus was on building a model for inclusive preschools, preparing students with special needs for the future economy and leveraging technology and design for independent living.

44. **Ms. Sepuloni** (New Zealand) said that technology presented exciting opportunities to enhance the inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities. In her country’s disability strategy, and its supporting plan and framework for measuring progress, New Zealand was envisaged as a non-disabling society where persons with disabilities had equal opportunities to achieve their goals and aspirations. Those mechanisms functioned together to implement the Convention and were governed jointly by organizations of persons with disabilities and government agencies. One of the aims set out in the strategy was to ensure that all places, services and information could be accessed with ease and dignity.

45. Her country had recently entered into a new partnership with the Pacific Disability Forum to help address the challenges faced by persons with disabilities in the Pacific region, which were intensified by inequality, social norms, vulnerability to natural disasters and geographic isolation. Her delegation welcomed the adoption of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy and looked forward to presenting the next Third Committee resolution on the Convention, which would be focused on accessibility. New Zealand would also nominate Mr. Robert Martin, the first and only person with a learning disability to have served on the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, for re-election.

46. **Ms. Qualtrough** (Canada) said that her Government was strengthening its approach to disability rights, inclusion and accessibility in a rapidly changing world by shifting its focus from combating discrimination to promoting inclusion. It was also going beyond the mantra of “nothing about us without us” to embrace the principle of “nothing without us”, since no aspect of legal, political, social or economic decision-

making did not affect citizens with disabilities. Under the Accessible Canada Act, which had received unanimous support in Parliament and was expected to enter into force shortly, the identification and removal of barriers to inclusion would be enhanced and a national human rights commission would be established to monitor implementation of the Convention and its Optional Protocol. Canada had acceded to the Optional Protocol in December 2018.

47. Her country's strong commitment to the implementation of the Convention was reflected in its close collaboration with civil society and international partners. In 2019, Canada had received its first visit from the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities and co-hosted the annual meeting of the Global Action on Disability Network. Her Government had also held a national disability summit to take stock of its progress and identify opportunities for further progress towards full inclusion.

48. **Ms. Warwick** (Observer for the International Disability Alliance) said that a number of positive steps had been made in the past year with regard to the promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities, such as the convening of the Global Disability Summit in London and the Disability Summit in Argentina, the development of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy and the consideration of the rights of persons with disabilities by the Security Council. However, there was a problematic lack of financial commitment at all levels to ensure the implementation of the Convention, which meant that there were insufficient resources available to ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities in development and humanitarian activities. Consultations with organizations of persons with disabilities were dwindling in some States. Many organizations were receiving insufficient capacity-building and financial support, in particular at the national and local levels, which undermined their ability to carry out advocacy, provide technical expertise to Governments and monitor international processes. Collaboration between United Nations country teams and national organizations of persons with disabilities would be required in order for the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy to be successful at the national level. To overcome those problems, International Disability Alliance called on Member States and the United Nations to invest in building the capacity of organizations of persons with disabilities as a matter of urgency; provide unified political support and financial resources for the implementation of the Disability Inclusion Strategy to ensure that gains were sustainable; and mainstream the rights of persons with disabilities across peace and security activities and

humanitarian efforts, including by establishing more partnerships with organizations of persons with disabilities.

49. **Mr. Yatani** (Kenya) said that his Government had adopted a national action plan and established an inter-agency coordinating committee, comprising States and non-state entities, to promote the implementation of the Convention. The theme of ensuring the inclusion of persons with disabilities in a changing world was in line with his Government's development plan for the period up to 2030. The Kenyan Constitution contained provisions concerning the rights of persons with disabilities and a rights-based approach to disability efforts, and a bill that would further transpose the provisions of the Convention into national law and empower the National Council for Persons with Disabilities to regulate services provided to those persons had been approved by the Cabinet and was awaiting debate in Parliament. The Senate was also drafting a bill to ensure that persons with disabilities could exercise their rights.

50. His Government was working with stakeholders to develop a booklet designed to combat stigma and discrimination by demystifying disability. The Ministry of Education and the National Treasury had developed a plan to promote inclusive education through the provision of support for students with disabilities. Under the plan, funds had been allocated for equipment, infrastructure, teacher training, economic empowerment grants, and sunscreen for persons with albinism. The Constitution provided for affirmative action to ensure that persons with disabilities were represented in appointed and elected Government positions at the national and county levels.

51. His Government considered that quality data was crucial to the development of effective initiatives to benefit persons with disabilities and therefore intended to include the Washington Group Short Set of Questions on Disability in the national housing and population census that would be conducted later in 2019. Kenya remained committed to taking into account the concerns of citizens with disabilities in all aspects of the country's development efforts.

52. **Ms. Bhumaid** (United Arab Emirates) said that her country continued to strengthen, empower and protect persons with disabilities by developing policies, legislation, initiatives and mechanisms for implementing the Convention, as part of a comprehensive strategy to protect human rights. The Government had declared 2019 to be the Year of Tolerance to underscore the importance of accepting differences.

53. In order to implement article 31 of the Convention, which concerned statistics and data collection, the United Arab Emirates had recently formed a committee whose members included persons with disabilities. The recently adopted unified national classification of disabilities served as a solid reference and a means of enhancing detection and evaluation tools and monitoring individual needs on a case-by-case basis.

54. To improve the standard of living of persons with disabilities and to help them live independently, the Cabinet had adopted plans to implement the Emirati Universal Design Code, which would make all buildings and facilities in the country accessible. An inclusion framework had been adopted by the Education and Human Resources Council to ensure equal opportunities in education. In order to provide persons with disabilities with more choice in terms of employment, the Government had issued a decision that empowered persons with disabilities and protected their equal rights in the labour market.

55. International cooperation and the exchange of information and good practices were critical to achieving the objectives of the Convention. The United Arab Emirates had therefore welcomed the opportunity to share its experiences and successes in the area of disability at the Davos World Economic Forum. It had also been pleased to host the 2019 Special Olympics World Games.

56. **Ms. Nzenza** (Zimbabwe) said that her Government had developed a national disability policy in line with the country's obligations to enhance implementation of the Convention. Persons with disabilities were being empowered through initiatives concerning land access and land ownership quotas, education, housing, loans and pensions. Her Government's commitment to that policy had been reflected in the appointment of a Presidential Advisor on Disability Issues, the establishment of a Department of Disability Affairs within the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare and the development of a national database of persons with disabilities. Her Government was also the largest employer of persons with disabilities in the formal employment sector.

57. In the context of its efforts to make Zimbabwe a middle-income country by 2030, her Government had adopted a comprehensive multisectoral approach to address the scourge of violence against women and girls, including those with disabilities, which included free specialist services and support to victims and survivors of gender-based violence. It had also established a permanent forum for continuous engagement with persons with disabilities. It remained

committed to the implementation of the Convention through inclusive policies for persons with disabilities. Zimbabwe was also grateful to the international community for its timely response to Cyclone Idai, the victims and survivors of which included persons with disabilities.

58. **Ms. Sylla** (Guinea) said that while progress on the implementation of the Convention in her country had been somewhat slow, strong action had been taken in recent years. The public had begun to take a serious interest in the celebration of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. The event, which was led by the Prime Minister and received extensive media coverage, involved advocacy, discussion and opportunities to showcase the talents of citizens with disabilities.

59. The Government of Guinea had unanimously adopted a law on persons with disabilities that provided for unprecedented protections for the rights of persons with disabilities, including through the introduction of equal opportunities cards that would improve their access to employment, education, health care and transport. Four inclusive vocational training centres had also been established. In accordance with the national economic and social development plan for the period 2016–2020, her Government was taking disability issues into account in its development programmes. Her Government hoped to receive multilateral and bilateral support for its efforts to improve the lives of the 1 million persons with disabilities in Guinea through institutional strengthening, socioeconomic empowerment and efforts to combat stigma. It was working, in the spirit of equality and justice, to ensure that no one was left behind.

60. **Ms. Antunes** (Portugal) said that, although measures taken as a result of the economic crisis had adversely affected the most vulnerable groups in Portugal, her Government had, since 2015, made progress in implementing the Convention by addressing the needs of and ending the previous welfare-based approach to persons with disabilities. It had introduced a social provision for such persons, which was received by 93,000 people, and had invested €35 million in the establishment of 31 centres for independent living, which provided services to 700 people. A law on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in education had been adopted and, in 2019, a video service had been established to allow deaf persons to use the national emergency line. In addition, her Government had approved quotas for the employment of persons with disabilities in the private sector.

61. **Ms. Swenson** (Inclusion International) said that the institutionalization of persons with intellectual disabilities was one of the main challenges that many countries must overcome in order to implement the Convention. Institutionalization was primarily the result of a lack of appropriate, affordable and accessible services and support in communities. Institutions must be closed and Government investment focused solely on the provision of adequate services at the community level. Schools, health care services, community resources and decent work must all be accessible to persons with disabilities.

62. Family members, usually women, were often the primary caregivers, supporters and advocates of persons with disabilities and should therefore be included in decision-making processes and discussions concerning the Convention. In that connection, it should be recalled that families were recognized as organizations of persons with disabilities in general comment No. 7 (2018). The family was the most powerful human institution, but families of persons with disabilities could be ruptured if there was a lack of support in the community. However, persons with disabilities could also be powerful members of their families, not least by bringing human rights issues into the daily lives of their family members and creating an awareness of disability culture that could persist for generations. Some families were in desperate need of relatively simple support, such as information. Others needed to learn to be advocates for the rights of a child with a disability or required significant support to care for a person with a disability with dignity in their home. Reason and conscience dictated that such support should be made available. Persons with disabilities must also have the right to form their own families.

63. **Mr. Martínez** (Paraguay) said that in December 2018 the President of Paraguay had signed a commitment reaffirming that the situation of persons with disabilities was a priority for the Government. His Government had developed a system for monitoring the implementation of the recommendations of international human rights bodies and was committed to revitalizing the interinstitutional coordination framework for implementing the national action plan on the rights of persons with disabilities. It planned to empower persons with disabilities and their families by involving them as leaders in the design of the action plan. A range of ministries that dealt with matters such as communication, education, children and adolescents and indigenous peoples would also be involved. A national commission on the rights of persons with disabilities had been established to facilitate dialogue between the Government and civil society, and standing

commissions on disability had been established within both chambers of the Legislative Branch. In accordance with the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired, or Otherwise Print Disabled, the Ministry of Education had been given a mandate to ensure that textbooks were available in accessible formats. Moreover, the situation with regard to disabilities had been declared an emergency for a period of 12 months. Paraguay had thus made significant progress at the normative level; the challenge was now to ensure that such progress translated into real change for persons with disabilities and their families and enabled them to participate in and enrich society through the full enjoyment of their civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights.

64. **Ms. Alves** (Brazil) said that the Convention had been incorporated into the Brazilian legal order as a text with constitutional authority. One of her Government's priority goals was to regulate the application of the law on the inclusion of persons with disabilities, to help implement the Convention. The previous week, her Government had enacted laws on the right of visually impaired persons to receive bank cards in Braille and on the mandatory reporting of cases in which victims of domestic violence were persons with disabilities. Her Government aimed to combat all forms of violence, including among indigenous peoples that had a practice of killing members of their community with disabilities.

65. Member States should invest in physical and communications accessibility and in changing attitudes, and her Government welcomed the focus on awareness-raising at the current session of the Conference. Brazilian sign language was legally recognized as the second national language, and her Government was committed to the mandatory inclusion of that language in the school curriculum in order to make Brazil a truly bilingual country. Persons with disabilities were achieving ever-greater prominence in Brazil, where the special secretary for the rights of such persons was the first deaf person to occupy a federal government position of such importance. Persons with disabilities must be involved in the planning and implementation of public policies. More support would be provided to such persons' family members as a result of an ongoing reform of policies in the area. The right of babies with microcephaly to be born must be upheld. Her Government would transform Brazil into a country of inclusion.

66. **Ms. Ilboudo/Marchal** (Burkina Faso) said that the ratification of the Convention and its Optional Protocol by her Government demonstrated its commitment to strengthening human capital and

ensuring social protection for all, in line with its national policies and programmes and the Sustainable Development Goals. With technical and financial support from its partners, the Government had adopted several legislative and regulatory provisions and taken concrete action to effectively address the needs of persons with disabilities. A national forum and a direct dialogue with the President had been established for persons with disabilities; an initial report on the implementation of the Convention had been submitted to the Committee; facilitation of entry into public office for persons with disabilities was under way; and projects were being funded to provide such persons with direct support for their socioeconomic activities.

67. She called on bilateral and multilateral partners, together with non-governmental organizations, to provide increased support for the efforts of the Ministry for Disability Affairs, which included the provision of comprehensive care for persons with disabilities, notably women and children in areas with security risks, and the preparation of the national report on the situation of persons with disabilities in Burkina Faso.

68. **Ms. Waly** (Egypt) said that her country had taken a number of measures to implement the Convention. All Ministries had begun implementation of a law on persons with disabilities that had been enacted in 2018. The Government provided cash support totalling over 4.2 billion Egyptian pounds to persons with disabilities who were unable to work and had also funded 150 projects to develop computer and mobile technologies to assist persons with disabilities. They also benefited from significant discounts on public transport. Accessibility had been improved at a number of Egyptian historical sites as part of an initiative to attract international visitors with disabilities and employ Egyptians with disabilities in the tourism sector. A standardized sign language dictionary had also been developed. In 2017 and 2018, a survey of more than 4 million newborns had been conducted as part of a campaign for the early detection of disabilities, and a register of persons with disabilities, disaggregated by disability, was under development.

69. Egypt, as well as other Arab countries, faced numerous hardships such as terrorist activity and armed conflict, whose repercussions were felt by persons with disabilities. It was therefore difficult to devise appropriate and targeted plans that could be implemented on the ground. Despite those difficulties, there was strong political will to work with civil society organizations, the private sector and United Nations partners to improve the lives of persons with disabilities and achieve social justice in accordance with the Convention and the 2030 Agenda. In addition, Egypt

welcomed the Valletta declaration on European Union-Arab cooperation to support the rights of persons with disabilities.

70. **Mr. Kolsto** (Norway) said that the initial dialogue between his country and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities had been very fruitful and that all concerns and recommendations of the Committee were being considered by his Government. Norway wished to be a country in which everyone had the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their background. His Government had recently launched “Society for all”, a strategy to promote the equality of persons with disabilities, which would be in effect from 2020 to 2030. It was also working on its fourth action plan for universal design. Organizations of persons with disabilities were widely consulted in the drawing up and implementation of plans and measures. Their involvement was crucial to increasing the quality of decision-making and actions.

71. Norway was ensuring that the interests of persons with disabilities were an integral part of all its relevant development assistance programmes and was guided by the commitment to leave no one behind under the 2030 Agenda. Over the next four years, the funds allocated to programmes specifically for persons with disabilities would be increased by 400 million Norwegian kroner. Norway also made active use of the disability marker developed by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in order to better plan allocations to relevant projects.

72. **Mr. Vardakastanis** (Observer for the European Disability Forum) said that it was absolutely crucial that persons with disabilities participated fully and unconditionally in public and political life. Nonetheless, millions of persons with disabilities around the world were faced with legal and other barriers to political participation. States parties should move from words to actions, so that at the next session they would be able to present practical changes that had been made to their legislations to make equal recognition before the law a reality. Democracy should be for everyone; otherwise, inclusion could not be achieved. While the world was changing, such advancements were not taking the whole population into account. The principle of “nothing about us without us” should be a priority of the disability movement. The purpose of the Convention was emancipation through the elimination of discrimination, inclusion and coercion.

73. **Mr. Lekarev** (Russian Federation) said that his Government was working to implement the recommendations of the Committee through its federal

and regional bodies and had put in place an action plan with instructions for the preparation of legislative decisions. Special attention was given to living conditions, whether in families, local communities or group homes. The Government would continue to improve accessibility in remote regions and rural areas under an accessible environment programme that had been extended to 2025. A rehabilitation system would also be established in order to empower persons with disabilities. In that regard, a network of auxiliary services was being developed to enable persons with disabilities to live independent lives and enjoy equal opportunities. A system of social support and assisted living was also being established and would be enshrined in law.

74. Legislative reform was under way to ensure full respect for the rights of persons with disabilities, prevent discrimination guarantee accessibility; federal and regional bodies were responsible for oversight in that regard, and draft legislation made provision for fines in cases of violation. Furthermore, in 2019, fundamental changes had been made to employment law, and support programmes had been established to help persons with disabilities to find work. In response to the Committee's recommendations, additional draft legislation was intended to improve the employment situation of persons with disabilities, including through a quota system.

75. **Ms. Griese** (Germany) said that her country remained committed to implementing the Convention. It was in the process of adopting a new inclusion strategy for its international development cooperation. At the national level, her Government would continue its efforts to include persons with disabilities in the labour market. It had launched an initiative to raise awareness among employers who failed to fulfil their legal obligations to employ persons with disabilities. It was also working intensively with all stakeholders to implement the Federal Participation Act, which provided persons with disabilities with more opportunities for participation and more self-determination. The Government would also update its national action plan for implementation of the Convention to include a focus on inclusion in the context of the digital transformation. The national digital transformation strategy would take into account the concerns of persons with disabilities and ensure that digital communication with public authorities would be accessible. There were also plans to further improve the accessibility of health-care services by means of a financial support programme.

76. An initiative to promote inclusive social environments was being implemented, with the participation of a range of stakeholders, in order to

enable full participation in communities for all. Her Government would also be working on the protection of persons with disabilities, especially women and girls, from all forms of violence. Germany looked forward to receiving feedback on its implementation of the Convention, which would be valuable in informing its future policies.

77. **Ms. Manombe-Ncube** (Namibia) said that ratification of the Convention and its Optional Protocol in 2007 had reaffirmed the commitment of her Government to protecting, promoting and fulfilling the rights of persons with disabilities as a matter of urgency. Namibia was in the process of reviewing its policies and legislation relating to persons with disabilities in an effort to better meet its domestic and international obligations. Since technology, digitalization and information and communications technology were crucial to the empowerment and inclusion of persons with disabilities in a fast-changing world, her Government was developing a national policy and strategic framework for digital operations. It also planned for a range of digital products and services to be provided by public- and private-sector stakeholders, including in schools for children with disabilities.

78. Social inclusion and the right to the highest attainable standard of health were high priorities for her Government. The Ministry of Health and Social Services continued to receive the highest percentage of the national budget, which allowed persons with disabilities to access free health care. Assistance was provided in various forms, including sunscreen for persons with albinism, orthopaedic devices, disability grants and the deployment of social workers. Her Government was also fully committed to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in society through participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and the political sphere.

79. Efforts to protect and promote the rights of persons with disabilities had met with challenges, including stigma and discrimination resulting from misconceptions surrounding disability and a lack of human and financial resources, particularly in the context of the state of emergency declared in response to the current drought conditions. However, efforts were being made to address such challenges, which were not insurmountable.

80. **Ms. Mendoza** (Honduras) said that historically persons with disabilities in her country had been forgotten and excluded. However, thanks to her Government's "Vida mejor" programme, persons with disabilities were receiving assistance that had improved their quality of life. The main actions taken by her

Government were the review and updating of national legislation, particularly the Penal Code, to bring it in line with the Convention and its Optional Protocol; the publication of Braille editions of the Constitution and the law on transparency and access to public information; the adoption of a law on sign language; and the establishment of a comprehensive social protection system.

81. With regard to education, the international standards for accessibility for students with disabilities had been incorporated into the national master plan for infrastructure. In 2015, a law had been adopted on sheltered employment for persons with disabilities, to drive their economic independence. Furthermore, in 2017 a law had been adopted to protect persons with disabilities from all forms of discrimination in the workplace. A programme to help such persons find work was also under way, and a tool had been established to enhance links between the disability sector and the business sector.

82. Much remained to be done persons with disabilities in Honduras. However, her country was on the road towards inclusion, thanks to its public policies and strong political will and the efforts of civil society. Most importantly, persons with disabilities could rest assured that they were no longer alone in pursuing social inclusion. The legacy of her Government would be to lay the groundwork to ensure that no one was left behind.

83. **Mr. Michalkiewicz** (Poland) said that disability policy in Poland was fully in line with the topics of the current Conference. Over the previous four years, his Government had come up with new initiatives relating to family policy, education, employment and accessibility, whose implementation had been made possible by the allocation of a record-breaking amount of funding for the implementation of disability policies. It was working on further changes to strengthen the framework for inclusion of persons with disabilities in all areas. A national solidarity fund had been mobilized that year to finance social and vocational services for persons with disabilities. An initiative was in place to support and facilitate the social integration of persons with disabilities and provide psychological, social and economic support to their families. The “Accessibility Plus” programme, which was being implemented to increase the accessibility of public spaces, products and services, had facilitated access to education, health care and transportation. A bill on accessibility was also close to completion and would be the legal basis for implementation of the universal accessibility principle by public institutions. Financial support for persons with disabilities had increased, and persons with a

significant degree of disability were entitled to health care and rehabilitation on a priority basis. The objective of his Government was to fundamentally change the lives of persons with disabilities through a comprehensive, modern disability policy that would guarantee the exercise of their rights.

84. **Mr. Haslam** (Observer for the International Disability and Development Consortium) said that it was an important time for disability inclusion. After decades of neglect, disability had been established as a core issue of the 2030 Agenda, in a manner that built on the foundations of the Convention. While many of the barriers and issues remained the same as those faced thirty years previously during the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons, there were also new challenges that must be addressed: the climate crisis and its related humanitarian and migration effects, the opportunities and potential barriers created by technological advances, and the political challenge to multilateralism, each of which had a disability inclusion dimension.

85. The United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy clearly built on the promise of the Sustainable Development Goals to leave no one behind. The ambition set out in the strategy had the potential to be transformative. Delivery on that potential must be ensured by allocating adequate resources to new initiatives and sharing knowledge derived from lessons learned. Coordination would therefore be crucial. His organization was responding to the challenges by increasing collaboration between its members. Partnerships with organizations of persons with disabilities, including the International Disability Alliance, remained central to its approach. All parties must strive to further develop such meaningful partnerships in order to deliver on the commitments set out in the 2030 Agenda and the Convention and the objectives of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.