



Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

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President: Ms. Ali (Vice-President) (Singapore)

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In the absence of Mr. Gallegos Chiriboga (Ecuador), Ms. Ali (Singapore), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 5: Matters related to the implementation of the Convention (continued)

(a) General debate (continued)

1. **Mr. Bin Momen** (Bangladesh) said that his country considered the Convention to be a development tool and had been one of its early signatories. Despite resource and technological constraints, Bangladesh was committed to its implementation. The role of the Committee was crucial in monitoring the implementation of the Convention and in promoting wider ratification and effective compliance. At the national level, his Government had placed special emphasis on the development and inclusion of persons with disabilities as part of its journey towards inclusive socioeconomic development. With support from the National Human Rights Commission of Bangladesh, non-governmental organizations and private sector companies, his Government had promoted disability inclusion by increasing accessibility and updated national legislation to bring it in line with the Convention. There were also plans to expand the disability allowance programme to cover all persons with disabilities in Bangladesh.

2. Awareness-raising of disabilities in general and autism in particular was under way at the regional and national levels and beyond, notably thanks to the efforts of Ms. Saima Wazed Hossain, daughter of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Differently abled youth in Bangladesh had been successfully participating in international sporting events and contributing to innovation in accessible information and communications technology (ICT) for the digital empowerment of persons with disabilities.

3. Bangladesh remained committed to working with all stakeholders at the regional, national and global levels in promoting the Convention. Making assistive technology more affordable and available for persons with disabilities was necessary for their digital empowerment and inclusion, as promoted by the “Digital Bangladesh” programme. However, Bangladesh would require support from development partners to reach the desired level of disability inclusion.

4. **Ms. Sulimani** (Sierra Leone) said that since its ratification of the Convention some 10 years previously, Sierra Leone had demonstrated relentless commitment to its implementation. It had enacted its Persons with

Disability Act in 2011, which proscribed discrimination based on disability and mainstreamed disability issues into institutional frameworks. The inclusion and unprecedented visibility of disability issues in the national development plan for the period 2019–2023 attested to the commitment of her Government to treat persons with disabilities as equals on the journey towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Persons with disabilities had also been included in several other national and municipal initiatives.

5. Earlier in 2019, Guinea and Sierra Leone had signed a memorandum of understanding on the socioeconomic and cultural empowerment of persons with disabilities in both countries, which included a commitment to share best practices on eliminating the barriers that prevented persons with disabilities from actively participating in development processes. An action plan was also being developed to guide the implementation of the memorandum, but technical assistance and contributions of resources from development partners would be required.

6. In spite of the gains made, existing institutional structures and functional capacities still needed to be improved to help eliminate all remaining barriers to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all spheres of society. Sierra Leone was committed to working with the international community and other key stakeholders to ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities in a changing world through the implementation of the Convention.

7. **Mr. Gumende** (Mozambique), speaking on behalf of the Committee on Victim Assistance of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction, said that, in light of its mandate, his Committee supported the implementation of the Convention’s provisions relating to victim assistance. One of the purposes of the Committee was to bring the discussion on the needs and rights of mine victims to other forums; it had therefore prioritized its cooperation with the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in recent years.

8. One priority of the States parties to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention was to integrate assistance for landmine victims into broader national policies, plans, legal frameworks and activities related to the rights of persons with disabilities. Full inclusion and meaningful participation of landmine survivors in all spheres of society were central to victim assistance efforts. The Convention was the most appropriate framework to support landmine survivors. The

Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities should adopt a general comment on article 11 of the Convention (situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies) to elaborate on its linkages with instruments of international humanitarian law, including the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention. Such a general comment would help to increase awareness of the specific rights and needs of mine victims and other persons with disabilities in times of conflict and humanitarian emergencies.

9. **Mr. Kuz** (Turkey) said that the prioritization of disabilities at the United Nations and the leadership of the Secretary-General in promoting disability inclusion across the system were welcome. Turkey approached disability-related issues from a rights-based perspective, which allowed measures for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in society to be viewed as an absolute necessity. Ensuring that persons with disabilities were able to enjoy all of their rights and access all services in the country was a priority. To that end, Turkey had put in place robust legal arrangements and established monitoring mechanisms. Such mechanisms, whose members included representatives of organizations of persons with disabilities, were able to impose fines for lack of compliance with accessibility obligations.

10. In order to promote best practices with regard to accessibility, financial and technical support had been provided to local authorities and public institutions in Turkey since 2012. To monitor public expenditure related to accessibility, a specific budget code had been in use since 2018. Turkey had started preparing a national disability rights strategy paper and action plan and a barrier-free vision document, which would be in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Those documents would be aimed at mainstreaming a rights-based and development-oriented approach to disability issues and were being developed in collaboration with civil society organizations. International cooperation and the sharing of experiences would make a significant contribution to the effective implementation of the Convention.

11. **Mr. Rai** (Nepal) said that his country was fully committed to the rights of persons with disabilities, which it guaranteed through special constitutional provisions on education, social protection and inclusion. In 2017, his Government had enacted its Human Rights for Persons with Disabilities Act, which had been guided by a rights-based approach and formulated in line with the Convention. Nepal had taken every possible measure to uphold the rights of and provide assistance to persons with disabilities to allow them to lead dignified lives, participate in social activities and enjoy equality in terms of rights and freedom.

12. Various forms of disabilities had been categorized based on their severity. Eligible persons with disabilities were granted allowances, subsidized transport, free education and free health care, and assistive devices were available to them. Quotas were in place to promote their employment in the public and private sectors. The concept of accessible tourism was also being introduced, which should raise awareness among local people about the importance of disability-friendly infrastructure in both public and private spaces. Nepal remained committed to working with the international community to build an inclusive society where the rights of persons with disabilities were ensured, promoted and protected.

13. **Ms. Hadas** (Observer for Enosh – Israeli Mental Health Association) said that mental health should be promoted by all international organizations through policies, legislation and the allocation of resources. The most effective and humane way of promoting inclusion for persons with psychosocial disabilities was through prevention, early intervention, and supportive care and services in the community. In order to implement the Convention, it was essential to maintain community-based services and family and peer support and to enable persons with disabilities to make their own decisions, without coercion. Cooperation among persons with disabilities, their families, the international community, professionals and Governments was required in order to usher in a new era for mental health.

14. She wished to draw attention to a serious humanitarian issue involving two young Israeli citizens with psychosocial disabilities. Because of their disabilities, they had wandered away from their homes and into the Gaza strip, where they had been held in captivity for over four years. All State and non-State leaders should undertake all measures within their power to assist those individuals, bring about their immediate release and provide information on their conditions and whereabouts to their families without delay.

15. **Ms. Čaplikienė** (Lithuania) said that an independent mechanism would begin to monitor the implementation of the Convention in her country on 1 July 2019. The principles for sustainable human development and society should be at the heart of policies for implementing the Convention. To protect the rights of persons with disabilities and their involvement in society, efforts must be made to lift them out of poverty by means of public policies concerning social security, education, employment, participation in cultural life, support for families and access to health care. Health care and social services must be duly adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities. In

Lithuania, there was a particular focus on training health care specialists to implement a human rights-based disability integration model designed to guarantee health care-related rights for all persons with disabilities.

16. To improve the quality of life and inclusion of all persons with autism spectrum disorder and their relatives, her Government had put in place an action plan on inter-institutional support for children with autism, which was focused on early diagnosis, access to high-quality health care, social and education services, training and psychological support for parents and the provision of assistive communication devices. It was important to establish a support system for persons with disabilities to provide access to services, ensure that such persons were able to live dignified lives and provide opportunities for their equal participation in society and the labour market.

17. **Ms. Rattaire** (France) said that commitment to achieving an inclusive society in France was based on political will to ensure that disability-related issues were a national priority. Collective solutions should be driven by the needs of individuals and based on the expertise of persons with disabilities and their families. Earlier that year, France, together with its European partners, had reaffirmed the importance of increased international collaboration to overcome obstacles to the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

18. Many local initiatives directly related to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in activities relating to sports and culture had been put in place in France. Moreover, efforts were under way to mainstream accessibility and inclusion in all Government actions. There was a particular focus on improving access to employment for persons with disabilities, which was increasingly perceived as an opportunity to enhance efficiency. A national autism strategy had been adopted in 2018, with particular emphasis placed on the need for early diagnosis and schooling, and the budget for that initiative had recently been increased by 70 per cent. France reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities. The promise to leave no one behind would only be fulfilled through inclusive, equitable development.

19. **Ms. Promsuwan** (Thailand) said that her delegation was committed to the realization of the objectives of the Convention, particularly through the elimination of discrimination in all its forms against persons with disabilities and by mainstreaming disability-inclusive development, in order to leave no one behind. Thailand had continued to formulate

national laws and policies in line with key international and regional standards on the rights of persons with disabilities and the recommendations of the Committee. It had also worked to promote the employment of persons with disabilities through a quota system, which had yielded positive results: there had been a significant increase in the rate of employment of persons with disabilities in the public sector, State-owned enterprises and the private sector. Nonetheless, more needed to be done to equip persons with disabilities with professional skills to give them better access to decent employment opportunities.

20. Multiple stakeholders, including persons with disabilities, played a significant role in shaping public policy and the health service system in Thailand. Persons with disabilities who were employed could choose between coverage under the social security system or the universal health coverage scheme, in accordance with their needs. Moving forward, her Government aimed to focus on building a barrier-free society and empowering persons with disabilities to live independently and with dignity in the changing world. To fulfil such objectives, collaboration with stakeholders, particularly organizations representing persons with disabilities, was key.

21. **Mr. Ligoya** (Malawi) said that in recognition of the critical role played by persons with disabilities in development, Malawi had elaborated a national disability mainstreaming strategy to ensure full inclusion and equal rights for persons with disabilities. ICT had a profound economic and social impact around the world and played a critical role in promoting sustainable development. Malawi had therefore been striving to ensure that its citizens with disabilities were able to benefit from ICT on an equal basis with others. To enable hearing-impaired persons to have access to information, the national broadcasting corporation provided sign language interpreting for some of its programmes. Tactile ballot papers had also been used during the May 2019 elections to enable visually impaired persons to exercise the right to vote in private.

22. His Government was working to establish a health care system that would allow all citizens, including persons with disabilities, to benefit from quality health care services. Special emphasis had been placed on care for persons with albinism. In that regard, the Ministry of Health had taken measures that included providing quality dermatological and ophthalmological services for persons with albinism; making items such as sunscreen and protective clothing accessible to them; helping to establish the local production of sunscreen; and making medical rehabilitation services for persons

with disabilities, including persons with albinism, available in all hospitals.

23. **Mr. Celada Pérez** (Spain) said that article 49 of his country's Constitution, which concerned persons with disabilities, had been amended to focus on the rights of such persons and provide for the active participation of civil society in the design of public policies. The law on the general electoral system had been amended to guarantee the right to vote for all persons with disabilities, and amendments had also been made to civil and procedural laws pursuant to article 12 of the Convention. Furthermore, a national day had been declared in Spain to celebrate the Convention.

24. The challenges identified by his Government concerned the situation of persons with psychosocial disabilities in relation to article 17 of the Convention (Protecting the integrity of the person); the implementation of article 24, on inclusive education; the amendment of the Spanish regulatory framework to bring it in line with the European directive on the accessibility requirements for products and services; women and girls with disabilities; children with disabilities; the implementation of the Master Plan on Spanish Cooperation for the period 2018–2021, which promoted disability inclusion in development cooperation actions; and the mainstreaming of disability in efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Such challenges could not be overcome without the participation of civil society, which must be ensured by Governments. His Government's actions would continue to be guided by the principle that what was good for persons with disabilities was good for the whole of society.

25. **Mr. Perl** (Observer for Rehabilitation International) said that his organization had recently launched its Global Disability Development Fund and Africa Fund, which was intended to provide financial support to initiatives to empower persons with disabilities. Special attention was given to initiatives that built the capacities of women and children with disabilities in rural areas. So far, projects had been funded in Brazil, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Nepal and South Africa. Taking proactive steps to give organizations representing persons with disabilities a chance to demonstrate their role in building better lives for persons with disabilities was very important. In addition to supporting concrete projects, Rehabilitation International intended to play an important role in the development of knowledge and the exchange of good practices. The quadrennial Rehabilitation International World Congress was important in that regard, but to meet the demand for more regular events, his

organization was also beginning to hold regional conferences.

26. Rehabilitation International wished to promote rehabilitation as a holistic concept that combined care, participation, education, inclusion in the labour market and substantial improvement to the well-being of persons with disabilities, in line with the Convention. However, a significant gap remained between intentions and delivery. On the ground, it had become clear that an increase in awareness of the needs of persons with disabilities had not necessarily translated into an appreciation of the urgency with which they needed to be addressed. Rehabilitation International was therefore working to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities not only through advocacy, but also through concrete initiatives using the expertise it had acquired over nine decades working in the field of disability rights.

27. **Ms. Muwebwa Ntambi** (Uganda) said that commitment to the empowerment and inclusion of persons with disabilities in all aspects of development was enshrined in her country's Constitution, national development plan and relevant policies. In order to empower persons with disabilities through implementation of the Convention, Uganda was currently executing its second national development plan, which reflected its commitment to ensuring social inclusion and the highest attainable standard of health through the promotion of equitable health services for all. It had also enacted a public finance management Act that required all ministries, departments and agencies to specify measures in their plans and budgets to ensure equal opportunities for all vulnerable groups. National guidelines on disability inclusion were used to guide sectors and local governments on mainstreaming disability into their development plans and annual budgets. A health sector development plan focused on providing the highest standard of equitable health services was also being implemented, and a mental health Act adopted in 2018 provided for national programmes on the prevention of avoidable sensory, mental and physical impairments through investment in immunization campaigns and food security measures.

28. Uganda had also amended its legislation on communications to include standards that met the needs of persons with disabilities, while the law on access to public information sought to remove barriers to information faced by persons with disabilities. A rural ICT programme was currently being implemented, and the national regulatory framework had been amended to make accessibility and inclusion explicit goals under the objective of providing universal access to ICT.

Programmes for inclusive education were also under way.

29. **Mr. Hermida Castillo** (Nicaragua) said that in conformity with its national development plans, Nicaragua guaranteed that vulnerable and marginalized persons, including persons with disabilities, had access to inclusive education, capacity-building and professional training in line with their abilities. His Government had been working to restore equal rights in fields such as health, rehabilitation, education and employment. It had also improved the accessibility of transport and public and private spaces. Through the “Todos con Voz” programme, the Ministry of Health had continued to register persons with disabilities and issue them with special identity cards. Among other benefits, the programme offered tax and customs exemptions for certain products, a number of welfare visits per year and monthly food packages. Housing designed to meet the needs of persons with disabilities was being constructed. A national day for persons with disabilities had also been established, in order to raise awareness.

30. Thanks to its legislation designed to benefit persons with disabilities, including a law recognizing Nicaraguan sign language, his country had served as an example to others in the region. The effective action taken by Nicaragua to provide a comprehensive response for persons with disabilities had been recognized by the Disability Rights Fund. The international community must work together to guarantee the achievement of a more inclusive world.

31. **Mr. Foulkes** (Bahamas) said that his Government was committed to ensuring a more inclusive and comprehensive society for every person living in the Bahamas. To that end, the Sustainable Development Goals had been incorporated into the country’s National Development Plan: Vision 2040, goal 7 of which was focused on building a nation free from poverty and discrimination related to gender, nationality or disability. His Government was determined to overcome any challenges to make that a reality.

32. Among its achievements, his country had established the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities, a statutory body that had been mandated to implement provisions of the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities) Act of 2014, which mirrored the tenets of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Since its inception, the Commission’s budget had increased by 2.3 per cent every year. The Government of the Bahamas had also signed a loan with the Inter-American Development Bank for \$30 million, which would assist in digitizing government services and increasing access to free Wi-Fi in public spaces. The

University of the Bahamas, in conjunction with civil society, had hired a full-time disabilities and compliance officer; established a disabilities advisory board to guide and monitor the University’s disability and inclusion agenda; and launched a disability law conference to address legislative, policy and ICT matters related to persons with disabilities.

33. **Mr. Kumalo** (Lesotho) said that, since its ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2008, his country had made strides towards ensuring the implementation of the provisions of the Convention. His Government, through the Ministry of Social Development, had drafted a bill to incorporate the Convention into domestic law in order to protect and uphold the rights and fundamental freedoms of persons with disabilities, as enshrined in his country’s Constitution. The bill set out the rights of persons with disabilities, such as their inclusion in society through participation in recreation, leisure and sports, and the right to the highest attainable standard of health, while addressing the injustices they experienced. It was further set out in the bill that the Minister of Health would involve the Disability Advisory Council in the implementation of the national health programme.

34. The country had adopted the Youth Council Act in 2008, which provided for the participation of youth with disabilities in the Council, and the National Assembly Electoral Act in 2011, which stipulated that political parties must facilitate the participation of persons with disabilities in all aspects of political discourse. In addition, the Lesotho Sport and Recreation Commission and the National Paralympic Committee of Lesotho had been established under the Sports and Recreation Act of 2002. The Government had adopted a national disability mainstreaming plan in 2015 and had appointed ministerial disability focal points whose role was to support implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by ensuring that ministerial plans covered inclusive services and programmes for persons with disabilities.

35. The Ministry of Social Development, with financial support from the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Children’s Fund, was conducting a study aimed at understanding the social, economic and political barriers facing persons with disabilities in terms of access to public services. The outcomes of the study would be used to formulate programmes to address the barriers faced by persons with disabilities in Lesotho. However, progress towards the meaningful inclusion of persons with disabilities was slow, given the many challenges faced by his country.

36. **Mr. Agbonon** (Togo) said that there were enormous challenges involved in improving the quality of life of the 900,000 persons with disabilities in his country. In that context, his delegation welcomed the reports of the Secretary-General that set out the obstacles faced by persons with disabilities. To counter such obstacles, Togo had taken both preventive and operational measures to ensure that persons with disabilities were not left behind. For instance, since its ratification of the Convention in 2011, Togo had mainstreamed disability into all sectoral development strategies and carried out actions to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities. At the strategic level, it had adopted a national development plan for the period 2018–2022 that took into account the concerns of persons with disabilities by consolidating social development and strengthening mechanisms for inclusion. In addition, it had set up a thematic group on inclusive education within the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and had established a national model of inclusive education. Braille and sign language had been introduced in teacher training courses, and networks of rehabilitation professionals had been created.

37. The sociopolitical integration of persons with disabilities was of particular importance to the authorities in Togo, where a person with a disability had been elected to the National Assembly in the legislative elections of December 2018. Given the importance of disability and inclusion issues, his delegation called on development partners to increase cooperation and support for Togo with a view to ensuring the optimal implementation of the Convention.

38. **Ms. Gugel** (Observer for National Association of Members of the Public Prosecutor's Defense of the Rights of the Elderly and Persons with Disabilities, Brazil) said that her organization was concerned that recent legislative proposals being made in Brazil would result in a loss of rights for persons with disabilities. The most serious amendment, if approved, would affect the country's social security system, infringing on article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and condemning thousands of persons with disabilities to a life of extreme poverty. The amendment would affect the rights of persons with intellectual and mental disabilities to receive a pension, to full employment and to work in an accessible and inclusive environment, altering social security contributions and limiting employment and pension rights.

39. Her organization was also working to halt reversals in the recently acquired rights of persons with disabilities, such as full legal capacity, particularly in a context in which the Government of Brazil was

reviewing its relationship with the National Council on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, a move that could go against the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The national disability assessment tool that was being developed was based on the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health and thus risked perpetuating the medical model of disability. Her organization was firmly committed to promoting equal access to inclusive education for all, a right that had been upheld by the Supreme Court of Brazil, and working towards ensuring that public areas were fully accessible and that persons with disabilities were given equal opportunities in all areas of life.

40. **Mr. González** (Colombia) said that persons with disabilities comprised a sector of the population that required special safeguards in the areas of technology, health, recreation, culture and sport. In that context, his Government was working to ensure that persons with disabilities enjoyed equal rights and opportunities that ensured their social and employment inclusion by implementing public policies based on the principles of equality and non-discrimination. Such policies were focused on providing persons with disabilities with participatory education; guaranteeing their rights and legal capacity; ensuring the availability of accessible physical infrastructure, transport and ICT; establishing a national observatory for the social and productive inclusion of persons with disabilities; and creating active links with the public and private sectors. His Government had recently approved a bill recognizing the full legal capacity of persons with disabilities of legal age, which constituted a major step towards the implementation of article 12 of the Convention and would have a significant impact on the effective enjoyment of other rights set out in the Convention.

41. His Government had placed equality at the centre of the national agenda in the form of a national development plan for 2018–2022, which incorporated strategies aimed at promoting access to health services, education, housing, employment, training and food security for the millions of Colombians with disabilities. For the first time in the country's history, the national development plan gave special attention to persons with disabilities through a pact that was aimed at gathering information, promoting employment and entrepreneurship, guaranteeing equal recognition before the law and improving accessible infrastructure.

42. **Ms. Mele Colifa** (Equatorial Guinea) said that her country's plan for economic and social development, which set new targets for 2035 and had been prepared in collaboration with persons with disabilities, was focused on poverty eradication, social inclusion,

sustainable peace, productivity, industrialization and environmental sustainability. At the governmental level, the implementation agenda was focused on the effective integration of persons with disabilities in three areas: social security, health and education. With regard to social security, a special service for persons with disabilities had been established by the National Social Security Institute; a home assistance health plan had been launched; and, since 2004, the State budget had included economic aid for persons with disabilities and low income families. In the area of health, an agreement signed by the National Social Security Institute and the Ministry of Health to extend medical and pharmaceutical coverage would benefit persons with disabilities. The Ministry of Education had created a special service to identify students with disabilities or impairments; provide education modules that were adapted to their needs; assist them through literacy and education centres; and provide training to speech therapists, social psychologists and special education teachers.

43. Non-governmental organizations in the country, including national organizations for the blind and persons with disabilities, had also contributed to the implementation of the Convention. The First Lady of Equatorial Guinea had been a champion of the cause, supporting initiatives, organizations and individuals and raising visibility and awareness to ensure political commitments and sustainable support to empower persons with disabilities.

44. **Mr. Ole Sankok** (Kenya) said that in nomadic communities in Kenya, it was very difficult to ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities, as such persons were seen as a liability. In some cases, birth attendants were instructed to kill children with disabilities at birth. To mitigate the risk of that scenario, his Government had introduced a monthly stipend for persons with disabilities from those communities so that they could be viewed as breadwinners rather than liabilities.

45. The issues faced by pastoral communities in Kenya, including the presence of wild animals, were different from those elsewhere. Wheelchair users in those areas had little use for motorized devices, but a wheelchair that could frighten away a leopard by imitating the call of a hyena could save their lives. Wheelchair manufacturers, which were mostly based in developed countries, should consider setting up factories in Kenya and engaging in consultations with users with a view to adapting their projects to the specific challenges faced in his country.

(b) Round table discussions (*continued*):

(iii) Inclusion of persons with disabilities in society through participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport

46. *Mr. Tan (Singapore) and Ms. Venkatasubramaniam (civil society) presided as Co-Chairs.*

47. **Mr. Tan** (Singapore) said that the round table would focus on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in society through participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport. Article 30 of the Convention provided a comprehensive outline of the parameters on how such inclusion could be achieved, covering access to media, cultural materials and sites, artistic and intellectual development, cultural and linguistic identity, sporting activities, and play for children. The enjoyment of culture and sports boosted physical, mental and personal well-being and sense of identity. With access to such activities and services, persons with disabilities, like everyone else, could lead more fulfilling and enriching lives. However, more could be done to support persons with disabilities; for lasting change to be seen, collaborative efforts would need to be undertaken by Governments, civil society and the public and private sectors. Access was not the only concern; it was also important to recognize that every person could contribute, and that when persons with disabilities enjoyed and participated in arts and sports on an equal basis with others, everyone would benefit from a more vibrant and diverse society.

48. Panellists should bear the following questions in mind when making their presentations. What were the major factors to consider in order to increase the participation of persons with disabilities in cultural, recreational, leisure and sporting life in their communities? What specific policies and actions should be undertaken by Governments to further raise awareness among officials, the general public and persons with disabilities of the importance of the inclusion of all persons in cultural life, and what role could the mass media and organizations of persons with disabilities play in that regard? Were there specific examples of how governmental policies had helped make cultural or sports facilities more accessible to and inclusive of persons with disabilities? What specific measures could be taken by Governments, international organizations and civil society to increase opportunities for persons with disabilities to participate in cultural, recreational, leisure and sports activities? How could Governments, in partnership with other stakeholders, ensure that persons with disabilities enjoyed their right to take part in cultural life?

49. **Mr. Jia** (Vice-President, China Disabled Persons Federation), panellist, said that his Government attached great importance to the participation of persons with disabilities in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport, in line with the requirements set out under article 30 of the Convention. China provided facilities that enabled persons with disabilities to engage and compete in sporting events. It had established a centre for rehabilitation that provided services to 100,000 persons with disabilities. Hundreds of centres had been created at the provincial and national levels to provide high-level training to such persons free of charge, in order to facilitate broader participation. Great importance was also attached to the Paralympic Games, as demonstrated by the many medals won by the Chinese team. Through participation in sports, persons with disabilities were able to become more integrated into society, improve their physical health and broaden their experience.

50. Over 10 million persons with disabilities took part in cultural activities on a regular basis in China, which helped them to find self-fulfilment and to integrate into society with dignity. Specific events targeted at persons with disabilities, such as the annual cultural week for persons with disabilities, were also held. Activities were organized in rural areas with a view to helping persons with disabilities to read and participate in cultural activities. Students with disabilities were also provided with opportunities to participate in sports activities, artistic endeavours and writing workshops.

51. In order to promote the participation of persons with disabilities in cultural and recreational life, leisure and sports, Governments must play a leading role to guarantee such participation on an equal basis. Such action was both a duty and a mark of social progress. They must act effectively through financial investment in the construction of facilities, the provision of equipment and the organization of activities in a propitious environment. All obstacles that hindered the participation of persons with disabilities must be removed. Those obstacles might be physical, such as inaccessible transport, or invisible, such as prejudice and lack of awareness. The efforts of society as a whole, including persons with disabilities and the media, would be needed to bring about the necessary changes. Ensuring the participation of persons with disabilities in international exchanges for the arts and sport was also necessary. Artistic troops from China had toured the world demonstrating the contribution that persons with disabilities could make to the arts.

52. **Mr. Al Naimi** (Chair, Arab Union for the Blind), panellist, said that his country, Qatar, attached special importance to protecting and promoting the rights of persons with disabilities in accordance with its national

vision for 2030. Since the adoption of the Convention in 2008, Qatar had adopted measures to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities and ensure their full participation in society, including through employment, involvement in decision-making processes and participation in cultural, sporting and leisure activities. For instance, government entities and non-governmental organizations had jointly organized several conferences dealing with issues pertaining to persons with disabilities, which had done much to raise awareness and promote the cultural life of persons with disabilities. The country had recently ratified the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired, or Otherwise Print Disabled, and the Qatar National Library provided many services to persons with disabilities. Cultural and social centres specializing in the needs of persons with disabilities, including one for the blind and one for the deaf, had also been created.

53. Other measures aimed at making culture, sports and recreational activities more accessible to persons with disabilities included creating accessible government websites; guaranteeing accessible programming on local television channels, including through the provision of sign language interpretation; inviting persons with disabilities to take part in the organization of the 2022 FIFA World Cup; organizing accessible leisure activities in public areas; ensuring that suitable toys were available for children with disabilities; and making cinemas, museums and other public spaces more accessible. The Government had also organized obligatory accessibility training for employees working in the tourism industry and at airports, and had worked in cooperation with entities such as the National Tourism Council and Qatar Airways to develop safety guidelines and ensure that hotels provided emergency information in Braille and special alarms for the hearing impaired to use in emergency situations. The Qatar Sports Federation for Special Needs played an important role in the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities. Civil society, in partnership with government entities and the private sector, had organized many cultural, sports and leisure activities for persons with disabilities. Cooperation and complementarity among stakeholders, such as government entities, civil society, the private sector and academia, were essential to upholding the rights of persons with disabilities and ensuring that they were able to enjoy life on an equal basis with others.

54. **Ms. Maldonado Vasco** (Technical Secretary for Plan Toda una Vida, Ecuador), panellist, said that her Government had adopted a policy, entitled Plan Toda Una Vida, to strengthen services to protect the

fundamental rights of all. The policy sought to improve living conditions by reducing risk factors, providing capacity-building and generating opportunities through cross-cutting action. In accordance with the Convention, Ecuador recognized the importance of inclusion and accessibility as basic conditions for participation in all areas of life. In that context, her country was working to encourage the participation of persons with disabilities, in particular children with disabilities and their families, in recreational activities, cultural life and sports, areas that were not always deemed essential by policy-makers.

55. A government programme had been launched to provide access to decent housing, with a focus on individuals in situations of extreme poverty. Around 50 per cent of persons with disabilities in the country were in the poorest two quintiles, which meant that social housing communities included many persons with disabilities and their families. On that basis, the programme supported community strengthening initiatives in 44 housing projects to ensure that families could live in decent homes that were inclusive and free from violence, and in which children, older persons, young people and persons with disabilities were viewed as agents of development and formed social networks and socioeconomic ties. Ecuador was working to create inclusive societies and promote value in diversity, and it recognized that outdoor spaces, such as parks and playgrounds, were important sites for community integration, social cohesion, health and well-being. It was also essential to ensure that housing and community spaces were constructed in accordance with the principles of universal design.

56. Play was a vital tool for persons with disabilities to enjoy cultural life, recreational activities and sport, as well as a social tool that ensured communication and dignity for all. In article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, States Parties had recognized the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts. Play was an important tool for children to relate to other people, objects and the space around them. Inclusive play was known to help to develop fine and gross motor skills and communication skills, and it gave children without disabilities the opportunity to interact with their peers with disabilities and learn vital lessons related to solidarity, awareness and acceptance.

57. Spatial justice and universal design were essential achieving a new social reality that took all people into account. Given the importance of play, participation and inclusion in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport in supporting persons with disabilities and their families in

the exercise of their rights, States should make a commitment to ensuring the participation of persons with disabilities in those areas and to build spaces, cities and nations in which diversity was present, valued and enjoyed and all persons were treated equally.

58. **Ms. Qualtrough** (Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility, Canada), panellist, said that inclusion was relevant to all facets of life and was at the heart of her work. As a person with a disability, she had been born into a world that was not built for her and did not take her needs into consideration. However, her experience of the Paralympic movement and as a human rights lawyer had convinced her of the importance of ensuring inclusion from the outset, rather than taking action against discrimination once it had already occurred, and had eventually led her to become the first ever Minister responsible for persons with disabilities in Canada.

59. In Canada, the approach to inclusive systems had evolved in two ways. First, public policy discourse was shaped from a human rights perspective. Those rights included not only the rights of full citizenship, but also the civic, political and economic participation of citizens with disabilities. The aim was to shift from reliance on individual accommodation to addressing discrimination and achieving inclusion. Second, Canada was moving beyond the principle of “nothing about us without us” to that of “nothing without us”, as there was no decision made by Governments that did not have an impact on persons with disabilities. Such principles were the foundation of the first national legislation on accessibility, the Accessible Canada Act, which was set to receive royal assent the following week. They were also reflected in the Canadian Sport Policy, which envisioned the full and active participation of persons with disabilities in sport and recreation.

60. Inclusion and access to sport opportunities were critical and constituted rights under the Convention. A mobile application had been created in Canada to connect children with disabilities to accessible and adaptive leisure activities. With regard to high-performance sports, the Government funded sports organizations to deliver programmes and services that encouraged the participation and development of athletes with disabilities and sponsored athletes with disabilities competing at the international level.

61. Sport had the ability to benefit community and social development and could effectively advance several social policy objectives. In Canada, sport was used to promote indigenous reconciliation, support youths at risk, empower veterans and integrate refugees and new Canadian citizens into their communities. It

was also a powerful tool for changing perceptions of what persons with disabilities could do. Furthermore, sport could drive change at the international level, for example in relation to Sustainable Development Goal 11, concerning sustainable cities and human settlements, and article 6 (women with disabilities) of the Convention. However, there was a critical need for more data to demonstrate the ways in which sport could advance broader social development objectives.

62. **Mr. Cruz Juscamaita** (Self-Advocate, Sociedad Peruana de Síndrome Down, Peru), panellist, said that he worked with Inclusion International on “Empower Us”, a self-advocacy programme for persons with Down’s syndrome. The right set out under article 30 of the Convention to participate in sports, culture and leisure was very important for disability inclusion. Sport was not only beneficial in terms of developing physical, social and life skills, it was also useful for breaking down barriers by showing what persons with disabilities could do. His own activities, including swimming and surfing, had shown people that persons with intellectual disabilities could enjoy the same activities as others if they were given the opportunity. Art and culture also offered means of expression. He had participated in the arts by taking on acting roles with actors with and without intellectual disabilities. The arts enabled people to understand that persons with intellectual disabilities also had an inner world. In terms of leisure activities, the participation of persons with disabilities in public places helped to overcome stigmas and stereotypes.

63. Unfortunately, his Government had a different vision for the participation of persons with disabilities. Local governments segregated persons with disabilities so that they played sports, engaged in cultural activities and spent leisure time only among themselves, instead of encouraging inclusive activities that were designed for all members of the community. National plans on the rights of persons with disabilities did not currently include sports opportunities. While there were some adapted sports programmes, they only existed for certain types of disabilities. There was also a lack of promotion of leisure activities for persons with disabilities.

64. In order to increase the inclusion of persons with disabilities, the authorities must understand that separating persons with disabilities benefited no one. Inclusion must start at school; often the first people that prevented participation of persons with disabilities were teachers who underestimated the abilities of such persons. However, demonstration of those abilities should not be necessary; rights should be for everyone, to ensure that no one was left behind.

65. **Ms. Al Qassimi** (United Arab Emirates) said that inclusion and accessibility were highly important for participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport. However, across the globe, persons with disabilities continued to face challenges in that regard. Equal and effective participation of persons with disabilities required full implementation of the Convention, particularly article 30. In her country there had been efforts to level the playing field for persons with disabilities by removing physical, social and other barriers, improving their access to information, and enhancing opportunities for participation by prioritizing accessibility through investment and universal design. Earlier that year, Abu Dhabi had hosted the 2019 Special Olympics World Games, the first of its kind in the Middle East. Her Government was also implementing an initiative to make Dubai a universally accessible smart city.

66. **Ms. Manombe-Ncube** (Namibia) said that Namibia remained fully committed to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in society through participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport. Her Government also continued to support its Paralympic athletes. She asked for examples of effective national implementation of initiatives to provide financial support for persons with disabilities to participate in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport.

67. **Mr. Saeedi** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that in May 2018, a cafe staffed by persons with Down’s syndrome and autism had been opened in Tehran, thanks to support and financial aid from the State Welfare Organization of Iran, and had been well received by society. It was considered a major and symbolic step towards eliminating stereotyped attitudes with regard to persons with disabilities and their participation in everyday life. With respect to sports for women and girls with disabilities, Iranian Paralympic and Olympic archer Zahra Nemati, who had won several gold medals and other awards, had become an inspiring role model for young Iranian girls and boys.

68. Dissemination of innovative ideas and best practices among countries could play a vital role in advancing the goals of the Convention, including the participation of persons with disabilities in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport. The Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran remained strongly committed to ensuring that all rights of persons with disabilities were protected and promoted.

69. **Ms. Placencia Porrero** (European Union) said that the European Union had been mainstreaming accessibility in cultural policies, including through the creation of the Europeana digital platform, and in the

selection criteria for the European Capital of Culture. It had also launched a pilot project for a European Union disability card in eight States, which gave persons with disabilities access to cultural and leisure activities in those States. In addition, the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 had promoted the participation of persons with disabilities in cultural activities, including at accessible museums, festivals and exhibitions, and special prizes had been awarded in the context of the Access City Award to Viborg, Denmark, and Monteverde, Italy, for their efforts to ensure that their cultural heritage was accessible to all. The Council of the European Union had adopted conclusions on access to sports for persons with disabilities in the European Union. However, the participation of persons with disabilities in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sports could be further improved. In that regard, it would be useful for the panellists to share ideas on the measures that should be prioritized to achieve full and equal participation.

70. **Ms. Martinez** (Observer for Red Latinoamericana de Organizaciones No Gubernamentales de Personas con Discapacidad y sus Familias) said that during the recent Disability Summit held in Argentina, civil society organizations had adopted a declaration highlighting the importance of promoting inclusion through participation and action and encouraging Governments to establish cross-cutting policies using measurable indicators to diminish the gulf affecting persons with disabilities in the region. Participation in cultural life, recreation and leisure promoted inclusion and were not merely activities but rather opportunities for people to develop their potential, creativity and self-empowerment. However, policies to ensure the right to participation were lacking. For instance, only 33 per cent of museums in Mexico were accessible to persons with disabilities, and only the capital city had a network of inclusive museums. Mexico had ratified the Marrakesh Treaty, but it was yet to define the criteria for its implementation.

71. With regard to sports, not enough was being done to promote participation and there was a need for more financial assistance to communities. A serious case was that of the Paralympic centre located in Irapuato, Mexico, which the Government had opened in 2012 and was now in a state of abandonment. It was important for the Government of Mexico to act swiftly and decisively to meet the commitments set out in the Convention, including by making clear which entities would be responsible for ensuring its implementation. The lack of disability policies and open discussions on participation had only given rise to uncertainty and denied persons with disabilities their rights.

72. **Mr. Lommelen** (Belgium) said that Special Olympics Belgium had the goal of reaching 20,000 athletes with psychosocial disabilities by 2020. In addition to offering adapted training programmes and raising public awareness, it was working with sports organizations to ensure that persons with and without psychosocial disabilities could participate in sports together. Belgium was also participating in the European Union disability card initiative. The World Summit on Accessible Tourism, during which participants had shared innovations and best practices in accessible tourism for all, had been held in Brussels in October 2018. Other measures to promote accessible tourism included the creation of information centres and accessibility labels for accessible accommodation and services and the provision of funding for accessible tourism services.

73. **Mr. McGrath** (Ireland) said that, as Minister for Disability Issues of Ireland, he was committed to reforming and investing in disability services to ensure that they were person-centred, and to learning first-hand about the challenges faced on a daily basis by persons with disabilities and their families. His Government had begun to reconfigure services to support persons with disabilities in making the type of choices that were available to all adults, in an accessible environment, and helping them to lead the lives they chose. To ensure a person-centred approach, it was necessary to transfer the focus from the services themselves to the people who used them by listening to persons with disabilities and their advocates.

74. Governments must invest in disability services. His country was making significant investments in services for persons with disabilities, who deserved the same attention as the rest of the population when it came to service planning, delivery and evaluation. Moreover, policies had been adopted to include children with disabilities in mainstream preschools, and guidelines had been established for universal design in early learning and care settings to support integrated play, learning and activities. All preschools would have an obligation to implement the guidelines, which should help promote the inclusion of children with disabilities in later life.

75. **Ms. Jochelson** (United Kingdom) said that her Government was working to enable widespread participation of persons with disabilities in sports, cultural life and recreational activities. Given the substantial physical, health and social benefits of sports, Sport England was supporting inclusive sporting activities at the grassroots level and encouraging sports clubs to increase the diversity of the coaching workforce. At the elite sporting level, her Government

was providing funding to support British Paralympic athletes. In addition, in 2022 Birmingham would host the Commonwealth Games, which were one of the only major multisport events in the world with a fully integrated parasport programme. The Paralympic Games held in London in 2012 had been a gamechanger in that they had helped the public to focus on athletes' talent and abilities, rather than on their disabilities. As a result, many Paralympic athletes were now among the country's most inspiring role models in business, broadcasting, politics and other sectors.

76. Her country was working to become the most accessible tourism destination in the world for domestic and international visitors. The museum sector had an important part to play in ensuring that the country's museums were accessible and compliant with building regulations and offered programmes that welcomed all visitors.

77. **Ms. Rattaire** (France) said that consideration of the participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport of persons with disabilities was often focused on the physical accessibility of venues and the accessibility of cultural content. However, persons with disabilities wanted to be full protagonists, rather than merely spectators. In that regard, persons with disabilities would be fully included in the organization of the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Paris in 2024. Her Government was working to increase public awareness of accessible sports, in particular by digital means, and collaborating with the National Institute of Sport, Expertise and Performance to support performance in high-level parasports. In the area of culture, her Government was piloting measures to ensure accessibility for all, including through programmes to make cinemas and museums accessible to persons with disabilities, promote accessible cultural activities and tourism and enable persons with disabilities to travel independently.

78. **Ms. Suta** (Colombia) said that her Government had implemented a strategy for the sociocultural inclusion of persons with disabilities that was in line with the provisions of the Convention. The strategy included the organization of meetings on cultural issues between representatives of the Ministry of Culture and organizations of persons with disabilities, during which participants discussed the accessibility needs of persons with disabilities and shared ideas on relevant cultural policies. The results were shared with other Ministries whose policies concerned persons with disabilities, to ensure a holistic approach. Efforts were also being made to raise awareness of disability issues at every level, from the general public to institutions.

79. **Ms. García-Ramos Guadiana** (Observer for Fundación Teletón) said that with its ratification of the Convention, Mexico had undertaken to create a high-level body to ensure its implementation. A law had been adopted that duly provided for the establishment of the National Council for the Development and Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities. However, in the six months since the new Government of Mexico had been elected, no Chair had been appointed to the Council. Rather than being considered a matter for social welfare policy, disability rights needed to be included in the national human rights agenda with a view to ensuring the basic rights of persons with disabilities and promoting their participation in society, including in cultural, sport and recreational activities. The lack of a governmental organ that included persons with disabilities in decision-making and public policy processes was limiting opportunities for them to thrive, and her organization called for a high-level commitment from the new Government in that area.

80. The lack of representation of the diversity of the stories of persons with disabilities led to negative narratives that labelled them as incomplete or broken beings, which affected their autonomy and hindered their inclusion in decision-making processes. To enable persons with disabilities to thrive and participate fully in cultural life, it was necessary to transform those narratives and make disability and intersectionality a priority at every level. Mass media and pop culture had a significant role to play in that regard, because the stories of persons with disabilities were often told without them and were not necessarily portraying the diversity of the community. Positive steps were being taken by social media influencers with disabilities to shift the narrative towards cultural inclusion, but the mass media and the Government should do more to uphold the principle of "nothing about us without us".

81. **Mr. Treloggen** (Observer for People with Disability Australia) said that, when he was a child with disabilities growing up on Thursday Island, Australia, his family had taught him about his history and that of his community and had instilled in him the idea that he had no barriers. However, to gain better access to education, health services and housing, he had had to leave his home and move to the mainland of Australia. He hoped to be able to return to his indigenous way of life one day. Under the Convention, parties were required to provide the necessary measures for indigenous persons with disabilities to thrive. In that context, States parties needed to ensure that indigenous peoples were supported in their self-determination by providing the means for them to maintain and strengthen their cultural traditions, knowledge and identities, in

line with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. States parties should also recognize and strengthen the active and informed participation of indigenous persons with disabilities in decision-making processes through their representative organizations, such as First Peoples Disability Network Australia. Establishing linkages between the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was critical to ensure their full implementation and to realize the rights of indigenous persons with disabilities.

82. **Mr. Buntan** (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities), speaking on behalf of the Chair of the Committee, said that the Committee was focused on ensuring the full and effective implementation of the Convention, including article 30. However, most countries with which the Committee had held interactive dialogues had not yet ratified or effectively implemented the Marrakesh Treaty and did not have a concrete plan to promote and ensure accessible tourism. Moreover, participation of persons with disabilities in sporting activities still tended to be limited to isolated cases, as there was insufficient funding for disability-specific events and limited access to mainstream sporting sites and events. States parties were therefore encouraged to take those issues into consideration in preparing their reports, with a view to achieving tangible results, and to work towards the ratification and effective implementation of the Marrakesh Treaty. States parties were also encouraged to recognize sign language as an official language, and to use Braille and easy-read texts as means of communication.

83. **Ms. Qualtrough** (Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility, Canada) said that although it had taken a long time for her country to recognize the equality of Olympic, Paralympic and Special Olympic athletes, such recognition had subsequently led to increased funding for recreational sports activities for persons with disabilities. Paralympic athletes now received funding that was either equal to or higher than that received by their Olympic counterparts. Equal recognition in policies had been the starting point, and increased funding had followed.

84. **Mr. Jia** (Vice-President, China Disabled Persons Federation) said that it was important to provide sufficient funding for the participation of persons with disabilities in cultural and sporting activities, as such participation was a right and an important means of integration into society. Participation in sports and the arts allowed persons with disabilities to participate in and benefit from the support of society.

85. **Mr. Al Naimi** (Chair, Arab Union for the Blind) said that it was important for the United Nations to take the lead in strengthening the commitment of States parties to the Convention. States needed to provide the necessary funds to ensure the participation of persons with disabilities in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport and to fulfil the provisions of the Convention.

86. **Ms. Maldonado Vasco** (Technical Secretary for Plan Toda Una Vida, Ecuador) said that in order to procure the necessary resources to ensure the right of persons with disabilities to participate in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport, it was vital for States to bolster civil society, including by holding productive dialogues and reach agreements with civil society organizations, to ensure that Governments fully understood the needs of persons with disabilities. It was also important to work with other States and with civil society organizations and businesses in other countries to further the implementation of the Convention.

87. **Ms. Qualtrough** (Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility, Canada) said that in discussions on the topic, the participation of persons with disabilities in sport, leisure and culture must be considered an essential human right and a means for citizens to participate fully in society. As long as the participation of persons with disabilities in such activities was a mere afterthought, it would be impossible to adopt a fully rights-based approach as envisaged in the Convention.

88. **Mr. Cruz Juscamaíta** (Self-Advocate, Sociedad Peruana de Síndrome Down, Peru) said that participating in sports had enabled him to establish relationships with other people. Sporting events such as the Special Olympics encouraged the inclusion of all persons and were a means to avoid discrimination and promote health.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.