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## Human Rights Council

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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

### **Written statement\* submitted by Shalva - The Israel Association for Care and Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (R.A.), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[22 May 2022]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only. The views expressed in the present document do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or its officials.



## **Rights of Women with Disabilities: A Crossroads of Vulnerability**

Women with Disabilities represent a merging of two different demographics, namely women and people with disabilities, which are respectively recognized in international surveys and whose rights are addressed separately in United Nations literature. Yet when considered a population unto itself; it becomes clear that women with disabilities comprise a unique and diverse cross-cultural community which experiences vulnerabilities and needs that are unlike those generally associated with either women or people with disabilities. As such, social policy and infrastructure that are developed according to the stipulations of the UN's Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) they are not suitable for women with disabilities. Although commonalities exist among the mentioned UN policies, such as the call for social inclusion and equality in the workplace; these UN policies neither individually nor collectively adequately represent or protect the human rights of women with disabilities.

Shalva, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status, aims to broaden the perspective on women's rights by surfacing issues and introducing program models that respond to the unique needs and of women with disabilities and enable them to fully actualize their human rights.

Shalva is a pioneering leader in the advancing the field of disability care and inclusion which primarily provides direct-care rehabilitative programs for thousands of individuals throughout the lifecycle, from infancy through adulthood; and support services to their families. The Shalva National Center, which is often visited by government and community leaders, including a delegation of the UN Human Rights Council in 2018, houses rehabilitation programs and facilities that serve as exemplary for the support and empowerment of people with disabilities in general and women with disabilities in particular. Shalva's mission and vision are consistent with the historical development and fundamentals of the United Nation's policies surrounding the rights of women; designed to position women with disabilities to be agents of their own change. Shalva was distinguished with special consultative status to the UN in 2018 and has since participated in sessions of the Human Rights Council as well as the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW63), among other UN fora.

The need for suitable treatment of women with disabilities is becoming more prevalent across the globe, in both high-income and low-income countries, and is growing with increasing urgency. The World Health Organization's report recently published in 2017 titled "Rehabilitation 2030 A Call to Action" measures the amount of years lived with disability (YLD) in various regions and concludes that the years lived with disability are increasing largely as a result of an aging population of people with disabilities. In other words, the advancement of medicine and rehabilitation services over the years have created a reality of aging adults with disabilities who are capable of unprecedented abilities to be meaningful contributors to society. Essentially, the WHO report identifies a paradigm shift currently taking place in the world of public health in which measuring the mortality rates of people with disabilities has become less relevant, whereas measuring levels of functionality and independence is much more significant. The WHO concludes that an aging population of people with disabilities presents an increasing need for more rehabilitation services for individuals with disabilities as they age. (1)

The WHO's report illustrates a reality in which today and onward into the future there are more adults with disabilities living in the world than ever before. Moreover, today's adults with disabilities are healthier and more functional with greater capacities for independence than ever before. This remarkably positive achievement is also laden with concern for their safety and wellbeing. Today's novel reality, requires a refined perspective and revised social policies and infrastructure that relate to the complex scenarios and vulnerabilities that women with disabilities may face as they become older and more independent, like gender-based violence and discrimination that are all the more amplified due to limited physical or cognitive abilities. Women with disabilities are likely approach adulthood with a lack of understanding of social standards, situational awareness, and even their most basic human rights.

In response to the new and changing reality of women with disabilities, Shalva has developed a series of unique programs that first and foremost recognize women with disabilities as a community unto itself, relate to the needs and challenges that are specific to them, and facilitate the actualization of their human rights. Shalva's programs include vocational training and placement, gainful employment, social programming, active participation in sports, and choice-based independent living in the community; empowering and enabling women with disabilities to create lives of dignity, meaning and independence. Each of Shalva's programs integrate essential components of healthy living; such as daily nutritious meals, fitness, and social recreation and involve individualized support for each of the participants; offering guidance by a multi-faceted team of professionals to navigate issues like identity, sexuality, self-image, and fulfillment of personal potential.

Shalva's programs for women with disabilities are part of a comprehensive adult services structure was developed following over thirty years of the organization's experience and expertise in the development of rehabilitative programs for children with disabilities and with a profound, first-hand understanding of the needs and day-to-day complexities faced by women with disabilities. Shalva prioritizes equality of opportunity and treatment for men and women with disabilities in co-education, workplace culture and wages, and access to sports and cultural activities. Moreover, program participation is granted with equal access regardless of religious affiliation, ethnic background, socio-economic standing and financial capability. As such, the women with disabilities in Shalva's programs reflect the spectrum of Israeli society and represent the cross-cultural diversity of their community. Shalva's programs represent replicable models that can be implemented and applied universally.

Despite catering to over one hundred women with disabilities and plans to continually increase participation, Shalva's programs champion individual-centered care and are designed based upon the fundamental value of enabling personal choice regarding education, employment, and living accommodations as a cornerstone of living a life of freedom, independence and dignity. Shalva creates an array of choice-dictated opportunities within the structure of each program and provides participants with professional guidance to choose options that suit their personal preferences, abilities and interests. Whether in the context vocational training, employment or independent living, Shalva offers various arrangements that appeal to a range of levels of functionality and levels of independence.

Shalva's unique recognition of women with disabilities as a demographic unto themselves, the development of rehabilitative programs that relate to their specific needs and human rights, and implementing these programs for a diverse participant body has resulted in a number of novel findings. One such finding is the capacity for programs geared specifically toward women with disabilities to open new opportunities for bridging gaps between social sectors and even for allowing women with disabilities to live beyond the cultural confines stipulated by certain social sectors with which they may personally affiliate. One such example, is that women with disabilities who affiliate with the Ultra-Orthodox social sector are able to live independently outside their family homes as part of Shalva's independent living in the community program, which is an opportunity that is not generally afforded to Ultra-Orthodox women.

One of the most significant and fundamental concepts which has surfaced in the context of Shalva's programs for women with disabilities is the important role of civil society and local communities in defining and fulfilling the human rights of women with disabilities. Especially in democratic societies and developed countries where social standards and opportunities are largely created and implemented by society itself, women with disabilities rely on civil society and local communities to pave the way for their independence, inclusion and actualization of human rights. Shalva stands ready to advance the way the world understands, cares for and embraces women with disabilities and calls for global partners to facilitate collective practical and policy responses to address their unique needs and human rights.

(1)“Rehabilitation 2030 a Call to Action: The need to scale Up Rehabilitation,” World Health Organization, 2017.