**Convention on the Rights
of Persons with Disabilities**

**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 3rd meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 12 June 2019, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. Puustinen (Acting Vice-President) . . . .   (Finland)

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In the absence of Mr. Gallegos Chiriboga (Ecuador), Mr. Puustinen (Finland), Acting Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

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

  (a) General debate (*continued*)

1.   **Mr. Beleffi** (San Marino) said that the Government of his country had been working towards the implementation of the Convention by adopting several legal measures, including a framework law on the assistance, social inclusion and rights of persons with disabilities. The San Marino commission for the implementation of the provisions and principles set out in the Convention had recently developed a national action plan for the promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities, focused on social and political inclusion and the full participation of persons with disabilities in education and the labour market. It was also engaged in promoting data collection; improving accessibility by removing architectural barriers; enhancing social and health services for persons with disabilities and their families; and developing training courses for emergency interventions in cases of natural disasters, suitable for people with all types of disabilities.

2.   Convinced that participation of persons with disabilities in cultural and recreational life, leisure and sport was crucial for their inclusion, his Government had recently adopted a law that expressly promoted the participation in sports of persons with mental and physical disabilities through the provision of services and barrier-free venues and guaranteed the participation of athletes with disabilities in the Paralympics and Special Olympics.

3.   **Ms. Gaye** (Senegal) said that her Government had launched a plan focused on human capital and social protection that was aimed at achieving inclusive development by 2035. With a view to improving the living conditions of persons with disabilities, it had adopted a law in 2010 that took a social approach to disability. The initial report of Senegal on persons with disabilities had been reviewed by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in March 2019. Moreover, as part of a flagship programme that gave financial and material assistance to persons with disabilities, over 50,000 digitized "equal opportunity" cards had been issued in the country.

4.   As part of the implementation of article 33 of the Convention, Senegal had established a collaborative platform through which ministerial focal points ensured the inclusion of disability issues in public policies. In that connection, and in partnership with the African Union, in 2019 the Government had held a training workshop for focal points on the inclusion of persons with disabilities, as well as a round table on disability statistics.

5.   Three major steps needed to be taken to ensure optimal social protection for persons with disabilities. The first was to strengthen the political framework for the oversight of public policy through the establishment of a high-level meeting for the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities. The second involved mobilizing resources for the national action plan on disability for the period 2017–2021. The third was to issue 40,000 new "equal opportunities" cards by 2021.

6.   **Mr. Jaime Calderón** (El Salvador) said that his country's National Council for Comprehensive Care of Persons with Disabilities had promoted regulations to guarantee rights and ensure the progressive eradication of discrimination on the basis of disability, including a draft law on the inclusion of persons with disabilities. Aware that persons with disabilities were at a disadvantage in accessing education, his Government had implemented an inclusive education programme aimed at affording access and effective learning opportunities at all educational levels to students with special needs or at social risk. Through the national literacy programme, which provided education to people with hearing, visual, intellectual and motor disabilities, over 330,000 people had learned to read and write since 2010. The Government had also implemented a social protection system, which had benefited over 1,760 persons with disabilities in rural areas and over 470 in urban areas. The National Council for Comprehensive Care of Persons with Disabilities had developed disability indicators that had been incorporated into disability programmes by the competent institutions. The Council had also provided input on the design of the 2020 national census form, with a view to the collection of disability-related data. Lastly, persons with disabilities had been included as one of the priority groups in the country's human rights plan.

7.   **Mr. Sahraoui** (Algeria) said that responding to the aspirations and ensuring the social integration of persons with disabilities was a top priority of his Government. In line with the relevant provisions of the Algerian Constitution, the Government had put in place several policies and taken various measures to ensure that all persons, including persons with disabilities, enjoyed equality before the law and were not

discriminated against. Moreover, Algeria had enacted an array of laws that ensured persons with disabilities were able to exercise their right to education and to access the labour market; removed obstacles that prevented the effective participation of all in political, economic and social life; involved civil society in promoting the status of persons with disabilities; and obliged the State and its institutions to provide persons with disabilities a monthly stipend and various forms of social assistance.

8. **Ms. Kalamwina** (Zambia) said that her country had put in place a robust legislative framework, including the Disability Act, to ensure the full implementation of the Convention, promote respect for the inherent dignity of persons with disabilities and ensure their equal enjoyment of human rights and freedoms. The national policy on disability was premised on disability mainstreaming and addressed issues of poverty, unemployment, human rights, economic development, information and education, prevention and rehabilitation, accessibility and HIV/AIDS.

9. Zambia had continued to make strides towards the promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities, including through the conduct of a national disability survey in 2015, the findings of which would serve as a resource for disability planning and programming. In addition, the Government had appointed focal points to mainstream disability issues in national development policies and programmes. With support from partners, focal points had received training in community-based inclusive development. A conference on community-based rehabilitation had been held in Lusaka in 2018, during which participants had called on Governments to ensure the involvement of persons with disabilities in government programmes. In that regard, her country had continued to include persons with disabilities in social protection programmes, such as the Social Cash Transfer programme, the positive impact of which was already being seen.

10. **Ms. Swaffer** (Observer for Dementia Alliance International) said that the mission of her organization was to ensure that persons with dementia were respected and valued as members of society and to advocate equal access to universal health care for the 50 million people living with dementia worldwide. Although dementia was the seventh leading cause of death globally, people living with dementia did not receive universal health care, rehabilitation or most other allied health services to support independence and social inclusion. Instead, those requiring assisted living were institutionalized and segregated from others, which went against their rights.

11. The frequent failure to take evidence-based research into consideration in the treatment of the behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia had led to an increase in the use of physical and chemical restraints rather than improvements in care. Secure dementia units also breached many rights, including the right to freedom, and were turning into "dementia villages", which ghettoized groups of people. In a context in which their human rights were systemically denied on a daily basis, it was essential to ensure that people with dementia were not left behind in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

12. **Ms. Al-Abdulla** (Qatar) said that the Constitution and laws of Qatar guaranteed the rights of persons with disabilities. Indeed, Qatar had enacted laws that guaranteed persons with disabilities legal protection, social security, housing, employment, health care and social and psychological services and education, as well as access to sporting and cultural activities. Public and private social solidarity institutions also played an important role in caring for and protecting persons with disabilities and provided them with services to ensure their independence and dignity, as well as their effective participation in all walks of life.

13. Qatar had adopted several policies and implemented many programmes designed to meet the needs of persons with disabilities, including a population policy, the Qatar National Vision 2030 and the national development strategy for 2018–2022. The Cabinet of Qatar had recently adopted a decision establishing a national committee on women, children, the elderly and persons with disabilities, which would be chaired by the Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs. Moreover, that Ministry had developed programmes that provided rehabilitation services to persons with disabilities, raised awareness of the rights of such persons, trained caregivers and maintained a database that was used to help implement national programmes and strategies aimed at persons with disabilities. Qatar was investing heavily in assistive technology in order to bring the best services and technical solutions to persons with disabilities.

14. **Mr. Dinh** Nho Hung (Viet Nam) said that his Government had launched a large-scale national survey on persons with disabilities in January 2019, using tools based on international standards on disability measurement. Its findings on the disability status of the population and the socioeconomic conditions of persons with disabilities would be used to inform plans and policies for addressing barriers and promoting participation in communities and society at large.

15.   Given that positive changes in the perception of disability issues were the starting point on the path towards a truly inclusive society, his country had undertaken a variety of activities to promote public awareness of disability policies, the rights of persons with disabilities and their participation in and contribution to society. Those activities, which included training courses, workshops and conferences, were targeted at government officials, persons with disabilities and their family members and the general public. The Government had also designated 18 April as Viet Nam Disability Day, during which artistic performances, exhibitions and sporting events would be organized for persons with disabilities.

16.   **Mr. Cooreman** (Belgium) said that his Government would submit its combined second and third periodic reports on the implementation of the Convention in April 2020. Although there was still a long way to go to ensure the full inclusion in society of persons with disabilities, some important milestones had been achieved. With regard to social integration, work was under way to modernize the integration allowance for persons with disabilities, and several universities had been asked to design a new tool to assess the support needs of persons with disabilities that would place greater emphasis on their participation in social life. In order to better protect the rights of women with disabilities who had suffered sexual violence, training and awareness-raising efforts were being conducted for social welfare and education professionals. Several initiatives had also been launched to ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the fields of culture, sport and leisure, for example by promoting accessibility in tourism infrastructure through certification systems and participation in the European Disability Card project. Lastly, the annual "EnVIE d'amour" event had highlighted the importance of the relational, emotional and sexual lives of persons with disabilities.

17.   **Mr. Perera** (Sri Lanka) said that while information and communications technology and assistive technology played a critical role in enabling and empowering persons with disabilities, the majority of those who needed assistive technology did not have access to it, so it was necessary to work to remove barriers and ensure equal opportunities. His country continued to recognize the importance of prioritizing persons with disabilities, including by ensuring their access to resources and services, and inclusiveness was enshrined in its Constitution. Specific laws had been enacted to promote the advancement of persons with disabilities, and the country's long-standing welfare

policies and programmes further contributed to ensuring that no one was left behind.

18.   In addition, the country's human rights action plan set out a vision for human rights for the period 2017–2021, with a special focus on persons with disabilities. Objectives of the plan included raising awareness of disability issues in the public sector and increasing the visibility of disability in the media. Sri Lanka was making every effort to address gaps and challenges, including by improving access to education for persons with disabilities through more targeted education programmes and using information technology to better serve students with disabilities. Sri Lanka was committed to empowering persons with disabilities through the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Convention.

19.   **Mr. Ait Aazizi** (Morocco) said that the Constitution and laws of Morocco prohibited any discrimination on the basis of disability. The Government had adopted policies to safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities and had put in place programmes to ensure that they were integrated into social and civic life and enjoyed the same rights as other citizens. Moreover, in accordance with the Convention, Morocco had enacted a law on protecting persons with disabilities. Public policies on disability took an integrated approach in order to ensure the engagement and support of all stakeholders. The Government was developing vocational training programmes for persons with disability and social support programmes for autistic persons.

20.   **Mr. Dolan** (Observer for the Disability Federation of Ireland) said that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights had not made provision for persons with disabilities, as demonstrated by the fact that the United Nations had had to establish the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006, following strong and consistent advocacy from the international disability movement. In addition, persons with disabilities were not an urgent enough priority for many States, and their efforts to make the required changes were often ineffective. Indeed, the way in which Governments and public services were structured was holding back progress, as they were not designed to operate horizontally to maximize person-centred outcomes, despite the best intentions. Many States needed to recognize and confront those barriers, and the United Nations should help to resolve inefficiency issues.

21.   Although the results of its efforts were often modest, Ireland was serious about implementation of the Convention and wanted to make progress. In that regard,

the Government of Ireland had recently undertaken efforts to address the issues faced by persons with disabilities, including through disability inclusion and equality proofing of budgets.

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

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

(i) **Technology, digitalization and information and communications technology for the empowerment and inclusion of persons with disabilities** (*continued*) (CRPD/CSP/2019/2)

22. *Mr. Puustinen (Finland), Acting Vice-President, and Mr. Hossain (civil society) presided as Co-Chairs.*

23. **Mr. Puustinen** (Finland), Co-Chair, said that the ongoing digital revolution was fundamentally changing the way people lived, worked and related to one another. The ensuing transformation would be unlike anything humankind had experienced previously. New technologies had great potential in terms of implementing the Convention and contributing towards the realization of the 2030 Agenda and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, which highlighted science, technology and innovation as important means for their implementation.

24. While technological solutions provided new ways of promoting human rights and the rights of persons with disabilities, they also raised several challenges, particularly in the realm of new frontier technologies such as artificial intelligence. Awareness of the risks, including the risk of the loss of privacy, was important. Furthermore, artificial intelligence and machine learning could cause discrimination and enhance gender and other biases, whether by accident or design. Measures should be taken to ensure that the development of new technologies was informed by a diverse range of perspectives.

25. Persons with disabilities must have access to technology and its benefits; without equal and affordable access, they would continue to experience increasing levels of discrimination. Raising awareness of the benefits of technology for the inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities was important. The promotion of the role of such persons as producers and uses of technology was also necessary.

26. **Mr. Hossain** (civil society), Co-Chair, said that everyone should have equal access to information and communications technology (ICT), as it changed lives and transformed societies. Assistive technology helped persons with disabilities overcome challenges in

relation to their environments. His own mobility was improved by assistive technology and ICT enabled him to carry out his professional work. Assistive devices enabled persons with disabilities worldwide to live independently and access education, health services, employment, and participation in public and political life. Access to those technologies was the fundamental right of all such persons and should be ensured by all Member States, in line with the Convention. The United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy had also identified access to assistive technology as a cross-cutting issue.

27. Technology had the ability to establish inclusive societies through awareness-raising, the elimination of discrimination and the promotion of human rights. To address the digital divide in low- and middle-income countries, it was worth considering how indigenous technology that was available in communities in those countries could be harnessed, how intermediate technologies could be upgraded and how technology could be transferred from one place to another. The participation of persons with disabilities in production, engineering and entrepreneurship was crucial to unlocking the potential of technology and addressing the technology gap and digital divide. As set out in article 32 of the Convention, international cooperation played an important role in that regard. The United Nations could contribute through its leadership and commitment and by bringing together stakeholders and mobilizing the international community.

28. **Mr. Puustinen** (Finland), Co-Chair, said that the discussion would focus on identifying the barriers that could impede access to technology for persons with disabilities and ways in which Governments, United Nations agencies and private actors could improve that access through cooperation. The measures that States parties and producers of technology should take to increase the availability and use of assistive technologies by persons with disabilities would also be considered. There would also be discussion on good practices for awareness-raising regarding the benefits of technology for inclusion and empowerment and for promoting the active and leading role that persons with disabilities should take as producers and users of technology.

29. **Ms. Matsinen** (Disability Inclusion Adviser, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Finland), panellist, speaking via video link, said that digitalization and technological developments were shaping the world and the future. Access to technological devices for persons with disabilities had improved with the incorporation of inbuilt accessibility features by product designers. The reduction in sales prices for mobile devices had also made purchase more feasible for persons with

disabilities. While the smartphone had not been designed to serve as an assistive device, it nonetheless acted as one for many persons with disabilities. However, persons with disabilities were typically among the poorest in their communities and even standard devices were often beyond their financial means.

30. Women and girls with disabilities and persons with disabilities who belonged to a marginalized minority had fewer opportunities to receive education, which led to lower rates of employment and reduced access to technology. That inequality was exacerbated by some national social security programmes that provided assistive devices primarily for study and work purposes. Mobile money was among a wide range of services that could improve the standard of living of persons with disabilities, empowering them through access to financial services. It eradicated the physical barrier of travelling to a bank or automatic teller machine (ATM). However, many persons with disabilities faced severe difficulties in obtaining and using the mobile devices needed to access such services. For example, blind and partially-sighted persons relied on assistance from others to handle mobile money, which left them susceptible to fraud. Distinguishing between different currencies and exchange rates could also be difficult. Such challenges particularly affected persons with intellectual disabilities, deaf persons and those with a low level of education and lack of basic numeracy and literacy skills. In response to such challenges, the largest service provider in East Africa had begun developing solutions in collaboration with organizations of persons with disabilities.

31. The transformation of data into a global resource meant that it was crucial for disaggregated data on persons with disabilities and their needs to be systematically collected and included in the data sets used for both public and private research and development purposes. Disability bias existed in big data but, unlike gender bias, it was not a well-known phenomenon. Addressing that issue required examining existing data and determining ways in which data could be used to present persons with disabilities and their needs in a representative manner for the purposes of future technological developments.

32. Inclusive digitalization would help countries to develop skilled workforces and contribute to economic development. To achieve those goals, the United Nations, Governments and the private sector should cooperate with organizations of persons with disabilities to identify technological needs and solutions. Member States should also guarantee international and national standards of e-accessibility. Governments should collect

disability disaggregated data through tools such as the Washington Group Short Set of Questions on Disability, and private actors and Governments should analyse existing data and identify gaps and existing biases. Lastly, private sector actors should use interoperability, universal design and inbuilt accessibility features as a starting point for the design and development of their products.

33. **Ms. Placencia Porrero** (Senior Expert, Disability and Inclusion Unit, European Commission), panellist, said that the accessibility of ICT was not keeping pace with the advancement of the technology. A shift towards an environment that ensured equal access for persons with disabilities to such technologies was essential. The definition of accessibility requirements in relation to products, services and infrastructure was key in that regard. Such measures should obligate those responsible to make products, services and infrastructure accessible and incentivize and reward compliance. They should also include enforcement provisions.

34. The European Union had adopted a number of laws to ensure that accessible ICT products and services were placed on the market, public authorities provided accessible ICT for their own services, and accessibility requirement were respected in the spending of key European Union funds. However, while legislation was essential, it was not sufficient; voluntary accessibility standards were also necessary. A number of such standards, designed to function at the international level, had already been established by the European Union.

35. While accessibility was relatively common in certain areas, it remained a rare phenomenon in newer forms of ICT, such as artificial intelligence applications and smart cities. Given the evolution of technology and the increasing levels of shared ownership of ICT resources, it was clear that continuing joint efforts were required to ensure accessibility. The sustainability of ICT accessibility was increasingly dependent on effective training programmes for ICT professionals and content creators. The European Union was committed to making sustained investments and additional efforts to ensure the implementation of an effective, accessible ICT ecosystem as part of its future disability strategy.

36. **Mr. Thurston** (Vice-President for Global Strategy and Development, Global Initiative for Inclusive Information and Communications Technologies), panellist, said that his organization worked with Governments to create and implement ICT accessibility and digital inclusion policies and programmes to support the technology aspects of the Convention. It also managed the International Association of Accessibility

Professionals and the Smart Cities for All global initiative.

37. A worldwide digital transformation was under way in classrooms, courts and justice systems, voting systems and political processes. Cities worldwide were investing heavily in technology, which was having an impact on critical services such as transportation, public safety and emergency preparation and response. Technology could and must support the empowerment and inclusion of persons with disabilities. However, good policies, programmes and tools were needed to help ensure that the global digital transformation led to greater inclusion and promoted the rights set out in the Convention, rather than making the digital divide worse for persons with disabilities. Currently, only 40 per cent of countries around the world had accessible Government websites, smart cities were not adhering to accessibility standards and persons with disabilities did not have equal access to justice. Governments were often not aware or chose not to use the global standards that defined what accessibility meant for every kind of technology and disability.

38. If Governments committed to purchasing only accessible technology, that would have an enormous impact and influence on the technology market and the development of increasingly accessible and innovative technology. In that connection, it was encouraging to see that an increasing number of countries worldwide were incorporating ICT accessibility standards into procurement policies as a means of promoting inclusion and human rights. Under the Smart Cities for All initiative, a range of tools had been created in multiple languages to help Governments, cities, courts, schools and employers, among others, to ensure that the technology solutions they were purchasing and deploying worked for everyone.

39. **Ms. Narasimhan** (Policy Fellow, LIRNEasia and Senior Fellow and Programme Director, Global Initiative for Inclusive Information and Communications Technologies) said that the Digital Accessibility Rights Evaluation (DARE) Index was a framework to measure the progress of States parties in implementing the ICT provisions of the Convention. The associated survey, which was based on a human rights monitoring framework, had had 121 respondent countries in 2018, representing around 89 per cent of the global population, with respondents including persons with disabilities, advocates and researchers.

40. The DARE Index evaluated progress in three broad categories. The first was country commitments, including ratification of the Convention and implementation of anti-discrimination laws. In that category, the global

average degree of compliance with the relevant provisions of the Convention was 65 per cent and two areas of concern had been identified: only 49 per cent of countries included a definition of ICT accessibility in their laws and only 35 per cent had included persons with disabilities in their universal service obligations, which meant that a significant opportunity was being overlooked for countries to fund ICT-related projects. The second category was the country capacity to implement digital accessibility, in which the global average rate of compliance was 57 per cent. Only 23 per cent of countries had a mechanism in place to involve persons with disabilities in policymaking; only 40 per cent participated in meetings and standard development organizations; and only 37 per cent offered courses on accessibility or universal design at major universities, which meant that capacity-building potential was being overlooked. The third category was actual implementation and outcomes. The survey had revealed that 60 per cent of countries did not have any policy in place for implementation of ICT accessibility. Only 2.5 per cent reported that they had a policy but that it was not being implemented, which meant that most countries with policies had taken steps to implement them. The survey examined implementation in 10 key technology areas, including television, websites, inclusive ICT in education and e-books. The average level of compliance in those areas was in the range of 31–48 per cent.

41. The outcome of the survey highlighted the importance of implementing policies, which were the first step towards catalyzing the engagement of multiple stakeholders to promoting ICT; conducting capacity-building; adopting standards; and involving persons with disabilities as key stakeholders. Solutions were available but needed to be adopted to ensure that persons with disabilities could use technology and participate in everyday life. One example of a successful solution was Sugamya Pustakalaya, an accessible online library in India that was a collaborative effort between the Government, non-governmental organizations and a private-sector organization.

42. **Mr. Al-Hammadi** (United Arab Emirates) said that an innovation-driven economy had helped his country to thrive in a knowledge-based and globalized world. Some people thought that a digital world was fast approaching, but in reality it had already arrived, and the United Arab Emirates was embracing and harnessing that reality in its path towards progress. In that context, artificial intelligence and other assistive technologies presented important opportunities to transform efforts towards the full inclusion of persons with disabilities by 2030.

43.   Close to 90 per cent of the population of his country lived in urban areas, and experience had demonstrated that cities could become engines for innovation and inclusive development. His country was therefore committed to ensuring that cities were fully accessible to persons with disabilities, including through the use of artificial intelligence technology. ICT was being used to identify gaps and create solutions to issues ranging from environmental sustainability to safety and promoting the well-being of citizens, while services were being redesigned to ensure equitable access for persons with disabilities and provide live data on performance. The United Arab Emirates was proud to be hosting the World Expo in 2020 and was working to ensure that it was the most accessible event of its kind to date.

44.   **Ms. Khivrych** (Ukraine) said that, thanks to the support of her Government and civic organizations, 25 per cent of schools in the country had created facilities for persons with disabilities since 2016. Despite the military aggression by the Russian Federation against her country, educational reforms had brought significant changes in terms of inclusive education, the "new Ukrainian school" project, decentralization and deinstitutionalization. An extensive network of resource centres with facilities for persons with disabilities had been created in 2018. Over 90 per cent of schools in the country now had high-speed Internet access; ICT training had been provided to teachers; new science, technology, engineering and mathematics laboratories had been set up; school mini observatories provided opportunities for remote observation and astrophotography of objects in space; and work was continuing on 3-D astrophotography. In addition, Lego sets were used in the classroom to construct robotized systems to aid in the teaching of electronics and computer programming. Robot parts could be printed on 3-D printers and controlled from smartphones, and interactive cloud services served to facilitate independent learning. Ukraine was preparing a strategy for inclusive education for 2020–2030, which would ensure equal access for all to ICT education.

45.   **Ms. Al-Mansouri** (Qatar) said that the paucity, poor quality and high cost of the tools needed to develop assistive technologies, including speech-to-text and sign language solutions, presented a challenge for Arabic-speaking countries. To counter such challenges, her Government, following consultations with stakeholders, had developed special programmes to bridge the technology gap. In that connection, Qatar had launched the first online portal for assistive technology in the Arab world and was striving to increase the number of technological solutions available in Arabic

by offering grants, prizes and technical support, building capacities and raising awareness of the impact of technology on the lives of persons with disabilities. Among the fruits of its efforts was the development of an Arabic sign language dictionary that took into account the cultural characteristics of the Arab world. Work was currently under way on a unified Arabic sign language dictionary that supported all technological solutions for deaf persons. Qatar hosted an annual conference for researchers, innovators and professionals to review the latest developments in the field of assistive technology.

46.   **Ms. Balčiūnaitė** (Observer for the European Union of the Deaf) said that her organization strongly believed that when applying universal design and developing ICT with features for deaf users, such as customized vibrating, visual alerts, sign language, real-time captioning and translation options, manufacturers and developers needed to collaborate with deaf persons and experts from the earliest stages and throughout the development process in order to identify and avoid potential barriers and deliver products that were truly beneficial for users. It was also essential for Governments to work with organizations of deaf persons on policy development. States parties to the Convention should work to ensure end-to-end accessibility of telephony and emergency services via real-time text or video communication. When watching audiovisual content on television, the Internet and video-on-demand services, deaf users should be able to choose sign language, subtitling or captioning in their preferred languages.

47.   New technologies, including assistive technologies and technologies based on artificial intelligence, played a major role in facilitating full and equal participation of deaf persons in society. Investment in research, design, development, production and distribution of new technologies and systems was therefore needed to ensure that they were available at an affordable cost. In addition, deaf experts and experts in accessibility for deaf persons should be involved in the creation and updating of standards and policymaking and work with industry to ensure correct implementation of existing standards and policies to support the development of accessible, innovative practices.

48.   **Ms. Hans** (Observer for the Shanta Memorial Rehabilitation Centre) said that women with disabilities were being excluded from the field of technology, beginning at school, largely owing to women's low visibility, low mobility and stereotyping. Moreover, gender disparity in education had made it particularly difficult for women with disabilities to access

technology and high-tech jobs. Governments therefore needed to implement specific policies, programmes and strategies to ensure that women with disabilities had access to technology. States also needed to take special measures to ensure that women with disabilities were protected from gender-based violence. To achieve those goals, it was necessary to provide disaggregated data and include such measures in national budgets. Moreover, States should engage with women with disabilities and their representative organizations in creating women-friendly environments and technology.

49. **Mr. Hernández Maya** (Mexico) said that discussions on technology, digitalization and ICT were very timely. His country had adopted a federal law on telecommunications and broadcasting, which promoted equal access to such services for persons with disabilities. For instance, subtitles, dubbing and sign language services were provided to ensure that the hard of hearing could access the country's most popular news programmes. To promote the implementation of the law, the Federal Institute of Telecommunications had established a set of guidelines on the accessibility of telecommunications to guarantee the rights of persons with disabilities and promote their access to services. The law also established obligations for telecommunications companies to ensure that their websites, equipment and customer services were accessible.

50. Mexico had adopted a universal digital inclusion policy and established a commission for the development of e-government to strengthen accessibility provisions for persons with disabilities, following international accessibility criteria. The public administration and businesses were expected to follow those provisions in the design of their applications, websites and digital content. An accessible e-government web portal had since been launched that enabled over 2.1 million persons with disabilities to complete administrative processes. Although significant efforts had been made to implement the provisions of the Convention regarding technology, digitalization and ICT, his Government recognized that more needed to be done in those areas and he would therefore welcome examples from the panellists of good practices undertaken by States to remove barriers that hindered access to technologies.

51. **Ms. Barron** (Ireland) said that universal design was defined in national legislation for the design of the built environment, products, services and ICT. In that regard, it was important to include persons with disabilities and older persons in universal design from the outset and to work with industry and professional bodies to that end. For instance, the National Disability Authority of Ireland had recently worked with a major banking organization to encourage it to engage with persons with disabilities and others on the design of its online services in order to improve its reach and customer engagement. The National Disability Authority was also working to ensure continued professional development in universal design for technology sector professionals, as a key challenge in striving for universal design of public services was the scarcity of experts in the technology sector who understood accessibility standards.

52. **Ms. Fa'atino Utumapu** (Samoa) said that, through its national advocacy organization, Samoa continued to lobby to ensure that persons with disabilities were involved in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of technology production. The University of the South Pacific was in a position to provide the necessary technology to support students with disabilities. However, financing the production of technology for persons with disabilities was a challenge for countries in the Pacific, given their limited resources. States parties were therefore requested to support inclusive accessibility and technology in the region to ensure that resources were available for persons with disabilities to enjoy their rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with others.

53. **Ms. Mlakar** (Slovenia) said that ICT was very important for persons with disabilities, as it offered opportunities for greater accessibility, reduced barriers and strengthened inclusion. Society should therefore dedicate more attention to ICT and digitalization and to helping persons with disabilities to acquire skills related to new technologies. In that context, a project had been launched in Slovenia to improve the lives of persons with various disabilities by using advanced technologies to facilitate multimodal transport for them.

54. The University Rehabilitation Institute had launched a project in which assistive technologies and solutions were used to enable persons with disabilities to gain maximum functional independence and safety in a home environment. The objective was also to enable research and development in the fields of e accessibility, e-inclusion, assisted technologies, ambient assisted living, the Internet, ambient intelligence and rehabilitation engineering.

55. **Ms. Akram** (Observer for the Special Talent Exchange Programme) said that in the 2030 Agenda States had committed to ensuring the inclusion of those who were left behind and to reducing the risk of them experiencing economic, social and environmental shocks. The Convention provided the framework for the

achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals for persons with disabilities through a rights-based approach. Despite the progress that had been made, a huge gap remained, particularly in terms of implementation and monitoring of inclusion, empowerment and equality in the changing world.

56.   The current barriers to ICT meant that persons with disabilities were denied access to basic services, which affected women and girls in particular. ICT was a luxury for non-disabled persons, but for persons with disabilities, particularly young people and in the context of education, it was a necessity. Further disaggregated data on disability was needed to inform national policymakers of the gaps and challenges relating to ICT and allow them to monitor the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the implementation of the Convention. Having policies in place was not sufficient; real implementation was of critical importance. Public-private partnerships to promote ICT inclusiveness must receive adequate funding. It was also important to give persons with disabilities a voice in the high-level political forum on sustainable development. In order to ensure the full participation of persons with disabilities in the implementation of the Convention, a commitment to development justice was necessary.

57.   **Mr. Zawu Gibson** (Observer for National Old Folks of Liberia and the United Blind Association of Liberia) said that Liberia was facing serious challenges in relation to information technology. His organizations were in need of support from the international community to develop programmes that would enable persons with disabilities in his country to begin making progress that had already been achieved by other countries. In the changing world, Liberia continued to be left behind, and that situation had been exacerbated by the effects of its civil conflict.

58.   **Baroness Buscombe** (United Kingdom) said her Government valued assistive technology as a tool to allow persons with disabilities to live independently and enjoy equal access to social and professional opportunities. It had therefore invested in its Access to Work scheme and its Disabled Students' Allowances. By creating demand, such schemes had helped to drive a market for assistive technology. Her Government had also supported innovation and technology in areas such as digital health. Such measures had economic benefits for the United Kingdom in terms of developing research expertise, taking research to market and building a consumer market. It was important to work together and share knowledge of the development of assistive technology, in order to realize common goals for persons with disabilities worldwide. The United Kingdom had been a founding partner of the critical

global partnership for assistive technology, ATscale, which aimed to provide 500 million more people with assistive technology by 2030.

59.   **Mr. Cini** (Malta) said that his Government provided a range of services to persons with disabilities, including subsidized funding for assistive devices such as hearing aids, wheelchairs and ICT equipment. Efforts were under way in his country to increase the availability of assistive technology, including through training in the use of assistive devices and the development of recommendations on which devices were most suited to the individuals with disabilities. Malta was also collaborating with the International Telecommunication Union to organize the Accessible Europe conference that would take place in Malta later in 2019 and would cover a number of issues related to ICT.

60.   **Mr. Celada Pérez** (Spain) said that in his country, various actions had been taken to promote technology to benefit persons with disabilities. A law had been adopted in 2010 that obligated State television channels to provide subtitles and sign language for a high percentage of their content. However, there were problems with the quality of the subtitled texts and the sign-language interpreting, as well as in terms of the subject matter and the times at which accessible content was available. Cultural content, for example, was not always made accessible. His Government was therefore conducting a review of that law. The previous year, a Royal Decree had been issued on the accessibility of public sector websites and mobile applications, to complement efforts that were being made to regulate accessibility in the private sector.

61.   Monitoring compliance with accessibility regulations and sanctioning non-compliance were also highly important. His Government had a designated office to receive complaints from all persons whose rights had been violated because of their disability, and a penalty mechanism for non-compliance was in place. The office had reported that 90 per cent of complaints concerned a lack of accessible technology.

62.   **Ms. Manombe-Ncube** (Namibia) said that technology, digitalization and ICT were of the utmost important for the empowerment of persons with disabilities in the changing world. The national Ministry of Information and Communications Technology was working on a comprehensive digital policy and strategic framework to guide digital operations in Namibia and maintain the current momentum towards digitalization. Furthermore, there were plans to have public and private stakeholders develop a range of products and services. The ICT division of the Ministry of Education, Arts and

Culture played a crucial advisory role in the procurement of technology for children with disabilities and provided quality assurance and support to schools in Namibia.

63. **Mr. Buntan** (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) said that the Committee recognized the importance of accessible ICT, including assistive technologies. In its general comment No. 2 (2014), the Committee explained how accessibility could be achieved, and embraced the concept of universal design and the use of assistive technology based on internationally recognized standards and called upon Governments to utilize their public procurement policies and legislation to promote and enhance greater accessibility. However, many States parties still had no recognized accessibility standards, and those that did often failed to take punitive measures in the case of non-compliance. National accessibility standards were often not in line with their internationally recognized equivalents, especially in the area of ICT accessibility, which created interoperability problems throughout the world. States parties should intensify efforts through legal and administrative measures to ensure that incentives for accessibility compliance and penalties against those that failed to comply were effectively implemented.

64. **Mr. Velasquez** (Observer for Vision Australia) said that it was important to encourage persons with disabilities to pursue degrees in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. He was visually-impaired and had studied electrical engineering, but, unfortunately, very few persons with disabilities had pursued similar degrees. Those with relevant lived experience should be involved in designing accessible technology that would benefit not only persons with disabilities, but also the broader community. It was important to make accessible technology affordable, particularly niche products that were only useful to persons with disabilities.

65. **Ms. Narasimhan** (Policy Fellow, LIRNEasia and Senior Fellow and Programme Director, Global Initiative for Inclusive Information and Communications Technologies) said that it was essential to work with persons with disabilities in ensuring that accessibility and universal design became ingrained in all sectors, including education, health, finance and telecommunications. Such persons could help to guide policymaking and implementation processes. Adequate resources and capacity must be ensured in that regard. While global solutions existed, identifying solutions appropriate for each country was also necessary. All States parties should accede to the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired or Otherwise Print Disabled to enable persons with disabilities to enjoy accessible books.

66. **Mr. Thurston** (Vice-President for Global Strategy and Development, Global Initiative for Inclusive Information and Communications Technologies) said his organization had developed a tool to assess how cities were using data and technology to close the digital divide, which he encouraged Member States to use. There was insufficient disaggregated data on persons with disabilities throughout the world, and the data that did exist was not being used effectively. With regard to intergovernmental cooperation, sharing good practices on a more regular basis was necessary. The best practices identified by the International Association of Accessibility Professionals might be of interest to States parties.

67. **Ms. Placencia Porrero** (Senior Expert, Disability and Inclusion Unit, European Commission) said that legislation had the power to be transformative. There should be rules in place that very clearly defined obligations and rights. There were resources and models around the world that could be used when formulating such legislation. There should be joint international efforts to produce standards that would be made publicly available and contain details on how to achieve accessibility. The capacity of professionals in the public and private sectors must be enhanced through training, in order to ensure the achievement and enforcement of ICT accessibility. Users must also be trained to use all the features incorporated into products and services. Ongoing investments in research and technology must be ensured so that accessibility was maintained and accessibility requirements were introduced in new areas.

68. **Ms. Matsinen** (Disability Inclusion Adviser, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Finland), speaking via video link, said that it was important not to lose sight of the many layers of identities of persons with disabilities. Multidimensional discrimination and access to technology for women with disabilities must be addressed, in light of gender-related issues in different countries and cultures. It was crucial to involve persons with disabilities in the development of technology in order to ensure their access to services. To that end, steps must be taken to make it easier for persons with disabilities to study technology and design and to become professionals in related fields. With regard to data, there should be regulation at both the national and international levels.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.