



Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

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Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Twenty-fifth session

Summary record (partial)* of the 538th meeting

Held via videoconference on Monday, 16 August 2021, at noon Central European Summer Time

Chair: Ms. Kayess

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* No summary record was prepared for the rest of the meeting.

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The meeting was called to order at noon.

Opening of the session

1. **The Chair** declared open the twenty-fifth session of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Opening statement by the representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations

2. **Mr. Cissé-Gouro** (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)) said that he was pleased to note the recent ratification of the Convention by Botswana and Uzbekistan and of the Optional Protocol by Georgia and Sao Tome and Principe. The continuing increase in the number of States parties to the two instruments, while welcome, was not being matched by progress at the national level in the implementation of the Convention and the adoption of a human rights model of disability. Consequently, persons with disabilities continued to face discrimination, exclusion from decision-making and the threat of violence, abuse and stigmatization.

3. At the forty-seventh session of the Human Rights Council, which had taken place from 21 June to 13 July 2021, the Council had adopted its annual resolution on human rights and climate change, resolution 47/24, in which it had called on all States to adopt a comprehensive disability-inclusive approach to climate change adaptation and mitigation policies. The Council had also adopted resolution 47/15, on accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls with disabilities, and resolution 47/8, on the elimination of harmful practices related to accusations of witchcraft and ritual attacks. It had devoted its annual full-day discussion on the rights of women to the theme of violence against women and girls with disabilities.

4. At the fourteenth session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which had been held online from 15 to 17 June 2021 under the overarching theme of “Building back better”, a number of speakers, including the Chair of the Committee, had emphasized that persons with disabilities must be included in efforts to respond to, and recover from, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in order for those efforts to be legitimate and effective. During the interactive dialogue held at the Conference of States Parties, the new Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities had stated that his first thematic report would focus on the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of armed conflict and that he would also devote attention to the theme of artificial intelligence and disability and to the transition towards non-coercive approaches in the area of mental health.

5. The ministerial declaration adopted during the 2021 high-level political forum on sustainable development, held from 6 to 15 July under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, contained an unprecedented number of explicit references to human rights, including a reference to persons with disabilities and the discriminatory laws, policies and practices that must be changed if no one was to be left behind.

6. On 28 May 2021, the Committee had added its voice to calls for the Council of Europe to withdraw the draft Additional Protocol to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Dignity of the Human Being with regard to the Application of Biology and Medicine (Convention of Oviedo). The vote on the draft Additional Protocol had been postponed until November 2021, which was an encouraging initial outcome.

7. At the thirty-third annual meeting of the Chairs of the human rights treaty bodies, held from 7 to 11 June 2021 with the Chair of the Committee as presiding officer, the participants had discussed the development of a predictable calendar for State party reviews, the ongoing harmonization of the treaty bodies’ working methods and the digital transition, including the use of new technologies to increase the efficiency, transparency and accessibility of the treaty body system. He appreciated the efforts of the Chair to secure the broadest possible agreement on those key topics.

8. The Committee, led by its working group on deinstitutionalization, was to be commended for having hosted seven online regional consultations on ending the

institutionalization of persons with disabilities, including in emergency situations. Those events had provided an opportunity for many persons with disabilities to engage with the Committee for the first time. In taking such initiatives, the Committee was putting into practice the principles of participation and inclusion enshrined in the Convention.

9. In its second performance report to the Secretary-General on the implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, OHCHR had reported progress under five of the indicators set out in the Strategy. In June 2021, it had submitted its first report to the Human Rights Council on its performance under the Strategy. The Office was currently drafting a report on article 31 of the Convention, which concerned statistics and data collection. In addition, it was developing a strategy to ensure that community-based support to persons with disabilities was included as an essential service in the post-2030 development agenda.

10. Lastly, he was encouraged by the Committee's decision to continue holding online sessions and conducting online reviews of States parties, despite the resultant technical challenges, pending a return to in-person meetings. It was hoped that such meetings could resume for those treaty bodies whose next sessions would start in September and October 2021.

Adoption of the agenda (CRPD/C/25/1)

11. *The agenda was adopted.*

Report of the Chair on activities undertaken between the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth sessions of the Committee

12. **The Chair** said that she, the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities and the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility had held a meeting with representatives of OHCHR to discuss a number of disability-related issues and were planning to hold periodic meetings in future with a view to better coordinating their work. At the fourteenth session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention, she had called on States parties to include persons with disabilities in COVID-19 recovery efforts and to address the isolation and segregation experienced by persons with disabilities during the pandemic. In common with other members of the Committee, she had participated in various conferences, webinars and other events held to discuss disability-related issues.

Cooperation with other United Nations bodies, specialized agencies, organizations of persons with disabilities and other competent bodies

13. **Ms. Bain** (Chair of the Human Rights Council Task Force on Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities) said that the Human Rights Council had held five sessions, in either a virtual or a hybrid format, since the outbreak of the pandemic. Hundreds of pre-recorded video messages had been played during those sessions, and panellists and special procedure mandate holders from all over the world had participated in them remotely. In that challenging context, the Task Force had made every effort to ensure that both hybrid and virtual meetings were as accessible as possible.

14. Since 2020, the Task Force had been taking advantage of the greater reliance on technology to make the work of the Council more accessible. For example, it had encouraged all stakeholders to include captioning in their video messages and had explored the possibility of using automatic captioning to increase the accessibility of both virtual and hybrid meetings as well as archived videos. The Task Force had successfully advocated for a substantive paragraph on accessibility to be included in the statement made by the President of the Human Rights Council at the start of each session. In that paragraph, delegations were urged to upload their statements in accessible formats and to ensure that the resolutions mandating panel discussions required them to be accessible. In 2021, the Council had held four panel discussions with International Sign interpretation and captioning. The interactive dialogue with the new Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, Mr. Gerard Quinn, had also been fully accessible.

15. At the two sessions of the Human Rights Council held in 2021, the Council had discussed an analytical report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the relationship between the realization of the right to work and the enjoyment of all human rights by persons with disabilities and an OHCHR report on the right of persons with disabilities to participate in physical activity and sport. It had also held discussions on the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of climate change, violence against women and girls with disabilities and the implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy across the Council's programmes and operations.

16. **Ms. Cisternas Reyes** (Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility), speaking in a pre-recorded video message, said that she had worked on a number of campaigns to raise awareness of disability-related issues, including a campaign entitled "Universal Accessibility: Pillar and Bridge for Human Rights and Sustainable Development" and another entitled "Access to Justice: For Inclusive Quality Police Services for Persons with Disabilities". She had also been involved in efforts to promote quality inclusive education, ensure that survivors of landmine explosions were considered as persons with disabilities, and promote and protect the rights of women and girls with disabilities.

17. **Mr. Mena Speck** (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction) said that it was necessary to establish policy planning and decision-making processes that put accessibility at the heart of disaster risk reduction. Since the adoption of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction had advocated for persons with disabilities to be consulted and fully engaged in the development and implementation of national and local disaster risk reduction strategies.

18. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Office had called for targeted interventions to support the needs of persons most at risk and had published relevant briefs in collaboration with partners. The recommendations contained in the briefs called on stakeholders, inter alia, to identify and mitigate any unintended consequences of responses to the pandemic, ensure that social distancing did not lead to social exclusion, address the increased stigma, discrimination and risk of violence faced by vulnerable persons, ensure that targeted messaging reached all groups most at risk, provide support for mental health and prioritize a rights-based approach to the pandemic. The Office had drawn attention to the recommendations in numerous public interventions, reports and webinars.

19. In the Asia-Pacific region, financial assistance had been made available so that persons with disabilities, including officials, could take an accessible online course entitled "Making Cities Resilient: Developing Local Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience Strategies". The Office was continuing to implement the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy. Consequently, all the Office's staff had completed a three-part training session on the implementation of the Strategy and disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction.

20. **Ms. Ferro** (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)) said that UNFPA advocated for the right of all persons with disabilities to live a life free from violence and discrimination and also campaigned to ensure that they could exercise their sexual and reproductive rights. It was essential to put the talents, hopes and perspectives of young persons with disabilities at the heart of sustainable development strategies so that no one would be left behind. UNFPA worked to ensure that young persons with disabilities took leadership on issues that affected their bodies, health and lives. Through its global strategy for adolescents and youth, entitled "My Body, My Life, My World", UNFPA promoted the human rights and social inclusion of women and young persons with disabilities. Under that flagship initiative, it was leading inter-agency collaboration to support the Global Network of Young Persons with Disabilities, which promoted access to United Nations processes for those persons. UNFPA recommended that representatives of the Global Network of Young Persons with Disabilities should be included in policy dialogues and consultation processes that concerned their rights. The Committee, for its part, might consider the adoption of a standing youth agenda to ensure meaningful partnerships with young persons.

21. **Mr. Rosas Barrientos** (Confederación Mexicana de Organizaciones en favor de la Persona con Discapacidad Intelectual (CONFE)) said that CONFE supported persons with intellectual disabilities at all stages of life, particularly in the early years, and worked to promote their integration into the labour market. During the pandemic, CONFE had

collaborated with various State agencies to protect the health of persons with disabilities and had produced a guide on that topic, in cooperation with other organizations. CONFE had sent numerous written submissions to the Government of Mexico to request the prioritization of persons with disabilities in vaccination programmes. Unfortunately, the Government had failed to respond positively to those requests. CONFE had worked with Inclusion International and various Latin American countries to produce a report identifying the effects of the pandemic on the economy, education, the health sector and employment. One of the conclusions contained in the report was that persons with disabilities had not received the support they needed to continue working or studying during the pandemic. He would be grateful if the Committee would use its interactive dialogues with States parties to highlight their obligation to ensure that persons with disabilities enjoyed the right to health, in accordance with article 25 of the Convention.

22. **Mr. Menze** (International Labour Organization (ILO)) said that staff from various departments of ILO, including human resources, communications and procurement, had worked together over several months to develop the ILO Disability Inclusion Policy and a strategy aimed at implementing that policy. The policy and strategy had been adopted by the senior management team, enabling ILO to work towards becoming an employer of choice for persons with disabilities.

23. In recent years, as part of its efforts to consider the future of work, ILO had analysed a number of megatrends that had already begun to affect the world of work. In February 2021, it had published a report entitled “An inclusive digital economy for people with disabilities”, which called on stakeholders to ensure that the digitalization of the global economy did not leave persons with disabilities behind. The ILO Global Business and Disability Network was engaging with a range of stakeholders in five Asian countries to review and design training and employment models that would lead to decent digital work for persons with disabilities. Following the publication of an ILO policy brief entitled “Persons with disabilities in a just transition to a low-carbon economy” in 2019, ILO had begun taking steps to promote the employment of persons with disabilities in jobs that contributed to the preservation or restoration of the environment.

24. **Mr. Pregel** (International Disability and Development Consortium (IDDC)) said that, during the past 16 months, IDDC had worked with the International Disability Alliance and other partners to launch the COVID-19 Disability Rights Monitor, a mechanism that had been used to gather information on how the pandemic had affected persons with disabilities. IDDC had also launched a series of campaigns to denounce human rights violations experienced by persons with disabilities during the pandemic, particularly persons living in institutional settings and women and girls. In collaboration with the United Nations Partnership to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, IDDC had published a report entitled “Adjust and Respond”, which was intended to provide United Nations agencies and Governments with practical guidance on ensuring that pandemic response measures did not exclude persons with disabilities. Recently, IDDC and the International Disability Alliance had launched a campaign calling on Governments, United Nations agencies and the private sector to prioritize access to COVID-19 vaccinations for persons with disabilities around the world.

25. IDDC had worked closely with the World Health Organization and its member States on developing a landmark resolution on the health of persons with disabilities, which had been adopted at the seventy-fourth session of the World Health Assembly in May 2021. The resolution recognized the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on persons with disabilities and called on Governments to take account of their needs in emergency preparedness, response and recovery plans. The resolution also urged WHO member States to address discriminatory practices that hindered access to health care, to collect health-related data, disaggregated by disability and other factors, and to facilitate the participation of persons with disabilities in the development of relevant policies and programmes. The Committee might consider calling on States parties to implement the resolution in national efforts to build back better from the pandemic.

26. **Mr. Di Rosa** (United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)), noting that the COVID-19 pandemic had had a profound impact on children with disabilities around the world, said that the 2022–2025 Strategic Plan developed by UNICEF was aimed at countering that

impact by reinforcing the centrality of children's rights in the agency's work and ensuring that cross-cutting measures to promote the inclusion of children with disabilities were taken as a matter of priority.

27. In 2020, UNICEF had worked to implement inclusive education programmes in 115 countries so that children with disabilities who were learning at home during the pandemic were able to receive individual support. As part of efforts to curb the spread of the coronavirus, it had taken steps to enhance access to water and sanitation services and had disseminated COVID-19 prevention messages in accessible formats to children with disabilities and their families. In addition, in response to a pandemic-related increase in demand, it had ensured the provision of psychosocial support to around 53,000 children with disabilities. Also in 2020, UNICEF had issued a guidance note on disability-related issues to be considered in COVID-19 response measures and another on communicating and engaging with children and adults with disabilities during the pandemic. In partnership with the Government of Norway, UNICEF was working with eight African countries to promote the consideration of disability issues in country programming.

28. **Ms. Arellano** (International Disability Alliance (IDA)) said that IDA, together with other organizations, had recently launched a call to action on protecting the right to family life and preventing the institutionalization of children, in accordance with the standards set out in article 23 (5) of the Convention and the Committee's general comment No. 5 (2017). The call to action had already been endorsed by a significant number of stakeholders.

29. At the regional level, IDA supported calls for the Council of Europe to abandon its plans to adopt the draft Additional Protocol to the Convention of Oviedo. IDA had recently launched its second global survey on the participation of organizations of persons with disabilities in order to determine whether, and how, such organizations participated in the development of government policies and programmes. With regard to efforts to control the COVID-19 pandemic, IDA urged the Committee to call on States parties to prioritize persons with disabilities in vaccination programmes and to closely monitor the adverse effects of the pandemic, and national response measures, on those persons.

The discussion covered in the summary record ended at 1.05 p.m.