



Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

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

Sixteenth session

New York, 13–15 June 2023

Summary record of the 6th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 15 June 2023, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. Ladeb (Tunisia)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

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

(c) Interactive dialogue with the United Nations system on the implementation of the Convention

Segment 1: Organizations and entities of the United Nations system

1. **The President** said that, in the years since the Convention and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development had been adopted, there had been an increasing appreciation of the advancement of disability-inclusive development as an effective means of ensuring that persons with disabilities could exercise their rights. Harmonization of those efforts was essential in order to maximize the benefits for persons with disabilities at all levels, particularly at the current critical juncture, which was fraught with multiple, intersecting challenges that threatened the progress made thus far. United Nations entities had made major contributions to and engaged closely with Member States, organizations of persons with disabilities and other stakeholders in relation to the implementation of the Convention, particularly in the context of the 2030 Agenda.

2. **Mr. Li Junhua** (Under-Secretary-General, Department of Economic and Social Affairs), panellist, said that the Department of Economic and Social Affairs worked to assist States in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and other international commitments. In the spirit of leaving no one behind, those objectives should be realized for, with and by persons with disabilities. The Convention provided a framework for that work. The Department's focus on disability issues ensured that the work of the United Nations system on disability was effectively integrated into the broader intergovernmental conversation. The Department also co-led and coordinated the work of the Inter-Agency Support Group for the Convention and the Task Force on Secretariat services, accessibility and use of information technology.

3. The previous year, the Department had undertaken a study on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for persons with disabilities, informing the report of the Secretary-General on inclusive development for and with persons with disabilities (A/75/187), and providing insights into recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic by building a more inclusive, accessible and sustainable world. It was also conducting a study on the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk and humanitarian

emergencies, and another on promoting and mainstreaming comprehensible communications to increase accessibility for persons with disabilities. Later that year, an update of the Department's 2018 *Disability and Development Report* would also be published, based on collaboration with other relevant stakeholders.

4. The Department had continued working to improve data on persons with disabilities, including through efforts to ensure their inclusion in all data collection processes. To fill the data gaps, it had engaged with civil society organizations to launch collaborations on citizen data.

5. The Department continued to support the implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy throughout the United Nations system. It also continued to promote accessibility in meetings, including by facilitating the use of sign language interpretation and through real-time captioning, to ensure that persons with disabilities had access to the work that concerned them. The Department stood ready to support all relevant stakeholders in making the aspirations of the Convention and the 2030 Agenda a reality for all persons with disabilities.

6. **Mr. Chavez Penillas** (Coordinator of the Human Rights and Disability Unit of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)), panellist, said that OHCHR welcomed efforts by States to define and advance urgent and meaningful actions towards accelerating the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in key areas, with a view to leaving no one behind. He expressed gratitude to Ireland and Qatar for their leadership in drafting the political declaration to be adopted at the 2023 Sustainable Development Goals Summit, which would lay the foundations for the global actions needed to address current challenges and future threats and recognized their commitment to the human rights of persons with disabilities. Ahead of the Summit, defining the strategic focus on persons with disabilities and on ensuring their ability to recover better from the pandemic and to face other emerging challenges was crucial, and must be reflected in the political declaration.

7. The transformation of care and support systems would be essential to bringing about significant change for persons with disabilities and with respect to gender equality, and must be articulated with clarity and conviction in the political declaration. While care economy discussions continued to gain momentum, the human rights of persons with disabilities had not been a sufficiently integral part of the conversation. It was crucial to seize the opportunity to correct that trend, as

the voice of persons with disabilities would be critical to achieving meaningful solutions. Efforts to expand the care economy without putting disability rights at the centre risked replicating systems that currently undermined the dignity, agency, independence and autonomy of persons with disabilities.

8. In February 2023, OHCHR had called on States to establish human rights-based care and support systems at the national level that were disability inclusive, gender responsive and age sensitive, as a lever for sustainable development. It had also called on States parties to the Convention to uphold their human rights obligations and to accelerate care and support system implementation through meaningful international action. Meanwhile, the 2024 Summit for the Future offered a unique opportunity to boost implementation of the commitment to leave no person with disabilities behind, to agree on concrete solutions to the challenges faced by persons with disabilities and to reinvigorate human rights-based multilateralism. In that regard, ensuring that A Pact for the Future included persons with disabilities and their human rights was crucial. Ensuring the intensification of efforts towards change was also crucial, and OHCHR stood ready to support work for a transformed world in which all persons, including those with disabilities, could be guaranteed a life of dignity and respect.

9. **Ms. Keita** (Deputy Executive Director – Programme, and Assistant Secretary-General, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)), panellist, said that the *State of the World Population Report 2023* had highlighted that approximately one eighth of the global population would experience some form of disability during their lifetime. The Sustainable Development Goals could not be achieved without implementing international and national policy frameworks that systematically mainstreamed the rights and needs of persons with disabilities.

10. UNFPA welcomed the sub-theme of the Conference on equal access to quality sexual and reproductive health services, which was key to universal health coverage. Barriers to accessing such services included the social stigma and discrimination faced by persons with disabilities and the false belief that such persons did not have normal needs. Persons with disabilities also faced potential mental health issues in the absence of accessibility and inclusion. Studies had shown that women and girls with disabilities needed better trained teachers, midwives and nurses to avoid various and potentially life-threatening complications. Such injustices extended to access to services responding to gender-based violence: while 160 countries worldwide prohibited domestic violence, only

17 had established accessible services for women with disabilities who were survivors of violence, and only one quarter of countries explicitly recognized the rights of women with disabilities.

11. The United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was unique and brought together numerous stakeholders to advance the rights of persons with disabilities worldwide. In that connection, the UNFPA Disability Inclusion Strategy had already met 75 per cent of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy indicators. Through its disability inclusion programme, UNFPA supported human rights, leveraged its technical expertise and strengthened partnership for the meaningful inclusion of women and young persons with disabilities.

12. The UNFPA Arab States Regional Office had developed a smartphone application to provide information on reproductive health and prevention of gender-based violence for young people with visual and hearing impairments. In Morocco, the collaboration and referral mechanism between health-care professionals had been strengthened to improve multidimensional care for persons with disabilities, and a national health and disability plan had been developed for the period 2022–2026. Meanwhile, UNFPA worked to improve the health of women in the Gaza Strip by providing midwifery counselling and psychosocial support; in Guatemala it worked with partners to create peer-to-peer connection for women with disabilities living in rural areas; and in Mozambique, a disability and inclusion training programme had been set up for mentors of young people.

13. UNFPA would continue partnering with the organizations of persons with disabilities. During the upcoming International Day Against Climate Change, young persons with disabilities would talk about how climate change affected the fulfilment of their rights and how organizations could engage in that regard. Investing in and fulfilling the obligations outlined in the Convention was crucial to promoting accessibility and inclusion.

14. **Mr. Barrett** (Technical Lead, Disability, World Health Organization (WHO)), panellist, said that under article 25 of the Convention, States parties were required to ensure that persons with disabilities enjoyed their inherent right to the highest attainable standard of health on an equal basis with others. Such a right had also previously been recognized in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. However, regardless of that long-standing obligation, the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the health

sector had consistently been an afterthought, leaving millions of people behind.

15. The recent WHO *Global report on health equity for persons with disabilities* had revealed that persons with disabilities experienced a range of health inequalities that negatively impacted their health outcomes. For example, many persons with disabilities died up to 20 years younger than persons without disabilities. Many were also at twice the risk of developing health conditions, such as depression, diabetes or cardiovascular disease. Many also experienced limitations in their daily lives, for example, in relation to inaccessible built environments or transportation. Such health inequalities were driven by unjust and avoidable factors, including stigma, poor access to health care, exclusion from education or employment, and poverty.

16. Addressing such inequities was essential, as doing so would ensure that 1.3 billion persons with a significant disability could enjoy their right to the highest attainable standard of health. Advancing health equity for persons with disabilities was also fundamental to achieving the three core global health priorities and progressing towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Health equity could be increased by ensuring equitable and accessible mainstream health services, including sexual and reproductive health care. Such an endeavour was important, as persons with disabilities faced a range of sexual and reproductive health inequalities, including increased risks of violence, abuse and exploitation, as well as discriminatory practices in the health sector. Ensuring accessible digital and telehealth, which constituted the future of health service delivery in most populations, was key. Engaging persons with disabilities in their representative organizations and decision-making processes was also vital.

17. To support implementation of its *Global report on health equity for persons with disabilities*, WHO was developing a national strategic planning tool and disability guide for actions that addressed the factors driving poor health outcomes for persons with disabilities. There was a shared responsibility to make equity for persons with disabilities a reality. While the power to achieve health equity ultimately lay with States parties, ongoing close collaboration between multiple stakeholders was also required. WHO was working at the global, regional and country levels towards that goal. States parties should act urgently in order to realize the highest attainable standard of health for persons with disabilities.

18. **Ms. Widmer-Iliescu** (Senior Coordinator for Digital Inclusion at the Development Bureau of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU)), panellist, said that since its previous report, ITU had developed several activities that had engaged over 700 ITU members, stakeholders and decision makers across 60 countries, aiming to strengthen knowledge of information and communications technologies (ICTs) and digital accessibility. Such activities encompassed training and advice for policymakers and decision makers from 14 countries in the Asia and Pacific region; guidance for States on evaluating and monitoring implementation of ICT accessibility in line with the Convention in order to build inclusive digital communities; delivery of executive training to regional ITU members and stakeholders; and sharing of good practices through interactive dialogues during the regional “Accessible – ICT 4 All” forums.

19. In order to support global efforts towards the implementation process, ITU had also promoted over 70 resources and tools for ICT and digital accessibility during over 30 free events held in multiple United Nations languages, which were localized where possible and were mostly in digitally accessible formats. During the reporting period, over 3,200 stakeholders and 761 participants had registered for training on how to ensure that online applications and recruitment systems were accessible to all. ITU also strived to continuously update and improve its resources, and its training on inclusive digital communications in crisis and emergency situations was currently available in five United Nations languages.

20. A guidebook on ICT accessibility for experts on agencies developing and implementing the ITU Smart Villages and Smart Islands Initiative had also been developed to improve knowledge of accessibility in the context of the digitalization of villages and islands. A 2022 ITU report had indicated that 90 countries had accessibility policies and regulatory measures in place, compared with only 60 in 2018. A global standard common to ITU and WHO on the accessibility of telehealth services had been launched in June 2022 and updated in March 2023, providing a set of requirements for service providers related to persons with disabilities.

21. Collaboration between ITU and WHO was being expanded to initiatives focused on safe listening in gaming and e-sports and on the establishment of a focus group to increase the contribution of artificial intelligence to health, in which a benchmarking framework was being developed to support developers and regulators in assessing artificial intelligence-based health solutions. ITU had enhanced its user interface and provided guidance to assist users with disabilities during

search processes. It had also developed reports on accessibility to broadcasting services for persons with disabilities, including the technical and operating parameters.

22. ITU staff underwent compulsory training in ICT and web accessibility, and encouraging results and performance had also been seen in 2022 in the context of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy. ITU also worked to ensure that its website complied with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. Mainstreaming digital accessibility in collaboration with all stakeholders was key to achieving the goals of the Convention. Everyone was encouraged to use and share ITU resources, with a view to building a digitally inclusive world.

23. **Ms. Abu Al Ghaib** (Manager of the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Fund), panellist, said that the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Fund was a unique mechanism that brought together the United Nations system, Governments and organizations of persons with disabilities to support implementation of the Convention on the ground. It had been working for 10 years in 87 countries to promote more inclusive systems and processes, transforming the lives of millions of persons with disabilities through inclusive laws, policies, capacity-building and engagement.

24. During the previous decade, the Partnership had promoted more inclusive practices in almost half of the countries that had ratified the Convention. Worldwide, Governments increasingly sought to turn their commitments into realities at the national level and there was a rising demand for the work of the Partnership, which was striving to obtain more resources to work in the 72 countries that were awaiting support. However, progress at the country level was slow, with some countries unable to fully transform their written commitments into concrete actions, implementation plans, budgets and monitoring, and engagement with persons with disabilities.

25. The Partnership was constantly investigating the best ways to advance strategies towards accelerating implementation at the national level. Doing so was vital given that the crises of recent years had significantly impacted the rights of persons with disabilities. The COVID-19 pandemic, climate shocks and the war in Ukraine had demonstrated that reality. In that connection, the Partnership had taken immediate action to respond to the crisis in Ukraine and neighbouring countries.

26. The international community must work together to ensure the establishment of genuinely inclusive policies and systems, which could not be achieved through siloed work. The previous year, the Partnership had supported 38 programmes as well as five multi-country programmes to advance the implementation of the Convention and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Partnership, its partner agencies and the whole United Nations system must work harder to address the gaps in implementing the Convention and accelerate progress in the countries most in need. Change could only be achieved through collective efforts and translating commitments into concrete actions.

27. **Ms. Alisjahbana** (Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)), panellist, in a pre-recorded video statement, said that ESCAP had been actively promoting and leading disability-inclusive development efforts in the region for 30 years, including four consecutive United Nations Decades of Disabled Persons in the Asia and Pacific Region.

28. The first two Decades had focused on shifting away from medical and charity models of disability towards a rights-based approach, which had contributed to the birth of the Convention. For the third Decade, Member States had adopted a strategy to make such rights a reality for persons with disabilities in Asia and the Pacific through a set of regionally agreed disability-specific development goals. The strategy called on States to accelerate the ratification and implementation of the Convention and to harmonize national legislation with the Convention. In preparation for the final review of the third Decade, ESCAP had conducted a survey to assess the current state of disability-inclusive development. Some of the most common achievements included the development of disability laws, policies and strategies, as well as improvements in physical accessibility, health, rehabilitation and education.

29. Currently, 49 of the 55 ESCAP member States and associate members with treaty-making capacity had ratified or acceded to the Convention. The recent series of publications by ESCAP on the harmonization of national laws with the Convention provided an overview of trends in the Asia and the Pacific region and sought to support ESCAP member States in enhancing harmonization efforts through a set of recommendations.

30. While the Asia and the Pacific region had made commendable progress during the third Decade, much more needed to be done. Across the region, persons with disabilities generally experienced high poverty and unemployment rates, and children with disabilities were

less likely to attend school. Only one in four persons with disabilities was employed, and seven in ten did not have social protection. Persons with disabilities were also underrepresented in decision-making processes, constituting less than 1 per cent of the total number of parliamentarians in the region.

31. In recognition of the need to reaffirm the commitment of the region to disability-inclusive development, the Jakarta Declaration on the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2023–2032 had been adopted the previous year. The Declaration highlighted six areas for strategic investment to accelerate actions to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities. The first part was on harmonizing national legislation with the Convention. The Jakarta Declaration advocated conducting comprehensive reviews of national legislation, providing guidance on implementation of the Convention and training all personnel involved in law enforcement in relation to the Convention. It also highlighted integrating the provision of reasonable accommodation and national policies, programmes and budgets and developing strengthening frameworks to promote, protect and monitor the implementation of the Convention.

32. The other five strategic areas highlighted in the Jakarta Declaration were the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities, universal design-based accessibility, engagement of the private sector, taking a gender-responsive lifecycle approach to disability inclusion, and progress tracking for disability-inclusive development. ESCAP was currently developing an operational guide to support member States in collaboration with the United Nations system and other stakeholders in the implementation of the Declaration. The Declaration provided a framework that enabled continued progress towards allowing persons with disabilities to enjoy their rights in the Asia and the Pacific region.

33. **The representative of Ecuador** said that the situation of persons with disabilities, who were underrepresented in global analyses, was a pressing issue. Moreover, shedding light on poverty and extreme poverty was necessary, particularly with regard to its impacts on persons with disabilities and their caregivers. Statistics demonstrated the high correlation between disability and the risk of poverty; efforts should be geared towards decision-making that promoted their independence and economic inclusion and enhanced their livelihoods. Poverty was a scourge that affected millions worldwide, but persons with disabilities were doubly vulnerable. Not only were there barriers arising from their disabilities, but there were also socioeconomic

challenges which hindered their access to opportunities and the necessary resources for a full and dignified life. Disability was not a condition that was inherent to the individual, but rather a result of barriers created by society. Promoting the independence and full participation of persons with disabilities through an inclusive approach was key. Ecuador had a national strategy for inclusion without barriers and a national plan for the creation of opportunities in line with the 2030 Agenda.

34. **Ms. Diata** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that the statement of the representative of the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Fund had referred to the many countries awaiting resources to help them to implement the Convention. The Democratic Republic of the Congo was working to implement the Convention at the institutional, legal and regulatory levels, and required technical, material and financial support in doing so. She requested such support from the Partnership, as her country had many persons with disabilities, particularly given the current situation of war.

35. **Mr. Hmidouche** (Morocco) said that since acceding to the Convention and its Optional Protocol in 2009, his country had spared no effort in harmonizing its legislative framework with the relevant provisions, including the principle of non-discrimination. In addition, Morocco had criminalized discrimination towards persons with disabilities in all its national laws and had created a commission for recourse against violations of the rights of such persons. It had also adopted a framework law and had integrated public policies to protect and promote the rights of persons with disabilities.

36. **Ms. Ramos** (Philippines) said that, earlier that year, the country team of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) had requested an informational session with the National Council on Disability Affairs of the Philippines, with a view to establishing a more formal partnership. Her country welcomed the interest of UNICEF in strengthening and mainstreaming its efforts related to disability and looked forward to formalizing that partnership in order to better serve children with disabilities.

37. The selection of the Philippines by OHCHR for the pilot testing of its national recommendation tracking database was also welcome. Such a system could act as a consistent reminder of how much action was required, helping to enable the treaty body recommendations and the Convention to become lived realities and facilitating true inclusion for all persons with disabilities.

38. **Ms. Manombe-Ncube** (Namibia) said that her country was working hard to implement and align its legal instruments with the Convention. However, it also faced funding issues, and despite being regarded as a middle-income country, that status did not reflect the reality on the ground. She asked how Namibia could benefit from the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Fund.

39. **Ms. Persaud** (Guyana) said that the Convention embodied a paradigm shift towards a social model that recognized persons with disabilities as full and equal members of society. Disability was not an isolated issue; rather, it was an integral part of society. Through its budgetary allocation, Guyana had made significant progress in terms of technical vocational training, entrepreneurship and the creation of related spaces. It was also moving towards greater levels of inclusivity in the labour force. She asked how her country could access funding and resources from international agencies and developed countries as it strived for meaningful change. Guyana looked forward to receiving assistance on the assessment of policies using standardized tools, in order to gain precise information on its level of implementation of the Convention.

40. **Ms. Abu Al Ghaib** (Manager of the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Fund) said that she recognized the significant and urgent needs of countries, and that the Partnership was constantly seeking additional resources in order to provide assistance in that regard. Responding to the question from the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, she said that the Partnership was currently launching a programme in that country, to be implemented by OHCHR, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). On the question from the representative of Namibia, the Partnership recognized the need to provide further support and was constantly seeking further resources to meet those demands. As soon as resources became available, the Partnership would launch additional calls for proposals and would endeavour to continue responding to needs, while actively engaging with countries to understand their demands.

41. **Mr. Chavez Penillas** (Coordinator of the Human Rights and Disability Unit of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)), responding to the question from the representative of Guyana, said that tools had been developed in consultation with several United Nations entities to monitor the implementation of internal

policies and analyse sector-specific issues. The use of human rights indicators could enable additional indicators to be established, in order to measure internal programmes in a standardized manner.

42. **Ms. Widmer-Iliescu** (Senior Coordinator for Digital Inclusion at the Development Bureau of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU)), responding to the comment from the representative of Guyana, said that 70 per cent of the global population would live in smart cities within the next three decades. Several online ITU resources were available to be used free of charge in various United Nations languages, including the “Beyond smart cities = smart for ALL” training course. Two years earlier, ITU had also developed a toolkit and self-assessment to receive tailored policies, strategies and good practices to enable evaluation and monitoring of implementation in line with the Convention.

Segment 2: Mandate holders and stakeholders

43. **Ms. Fefoame** (Chairperson, Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities), panellist, said that over the previous year, the Committee had held 14 constructive dialogues with States parties and had adopted 14 concluding observations concerning all obligations and rights and 10 lists of issues, as well as two lists of issues prior to reporting as part of the review processes. It had considered seven individual communications under the Optional Protocol, as well as information and procedures related to allegations of grave and systematic violations of rights under the Convention. The Committee had also decided to prepare a general comment on article 11 of the Convention, on situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies.

44. In addition, the Committee had adopted general comment No.8 (2022) on the right of persons with disabilities to work and employment (CRPD/C/GC/8). The Committee was aware that ableism adversely affected the right to work and urged States parties to repeal all discriminatory legislation that excluded or limited the participation of persons with disabilities in the open labour markets.

45. The Committee’s guidelines on deinstitutionalization, including in emergencies (CRPD/C/5), complemented its general comment No. 5 (2017) on living independently and being included in the community (CRPD/C/GC/5) and the guidelines on the right to liberty and security of persons with disabilities (A/72/55, annex). The Committee urged States to ensure the transition of persons with disabilities from institutions to independent living communities on an equal basis with others.

46. The Committee continued interacting with other human rights treaty bodies and United Nations agencies and programmes, particularly with regard to the human rights-based approach to disabilities. It also continued to engage with national human rights institutions, independent mechanisms and frameworks, regional organizations, organizations of persons with disabilities and other civil society organizations. Moreover, members of the Committee had met that week with some signatory States, encouraging them towards better implementation and ratification of the Convention.

47. Challenges to the work of the Committee included the fact that there had been no increase in the number of plenary or pre-sessional working group meetings since 2014, even though the membership of the Convention had increased from 130 to 186 States parties between 2013 and 2023. Consequently, the consideration of initial reports took an average of six years, and that of periodic reports took an average of four years, making the Committee the treaty body with the largest backlog of reports pending consideration. There was also limited understanding and insufficient implementation of accessibility and reasonable accommodation standards by the entities concerned.

48. Meanwhile, the decision to limit remote interpretation to 30 minutes during three-hour hybrid meetings disproportionately affected the online participation of persons with disabilities. The lack of funds for plain language and easy-read versions of documents had also been an issue since the establishment of the Committee. All States parties should engage in awareness-raising activities in that regard. The Committee remained committed to working with all stakeholders in advancing the sub-themes under discussion through an intersectional lens.

49. **Ms. Cisternas Reyes** (Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility), panellist, said that in line with the Convention and the 2030 Agenda, guidelines and documents had been developed on inclusive education, the justice system and motherhood for women with disabilities. Those actions had led to the production of written documents and videos that could be used for capacity-building purposes among staff members. Videos had also been created for children and adolescents on their classmates with disabilities, while audiovisual materials had been developed to address such issues as the right to education and access to justice, and motherhood for women with disabilities. Additional videos were being developed on digital accessibility guidelines, and eight campaigns with audiovisual guidelines were under way. All States parties and civil society organizations were invited to use those materials in their own countries,

including through capacity-building and workshops for staff in various fields.

50. Cross-cutting activities were under way to address the needs of women with disabilities. It was important to recall the need to ensure intersectionality between the United Nations Gender Parity Strategy and the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, with a view to seeing women with disabilities working within the Organization. Inclusive education had always been a central component of the mandate, and cross-cutting actions for the rights of persons with disabilities were key, including through the work of local governments at the grass-roots level.

51. **Ms. Alambuya** (Civil Society Representative, President of Transforming Communities for Inclusion), panellist, said that as an African woman with a disability, she wished to emphasize that persons with disabilities faced multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, which often remained unrecognized and unaddressed. Welcoming the guidelines on deinstitutionalization, including in emergencies (CRPD/C/5), she called for them to be implemented promptly and comprehensively.

52. It was more important than ever to ensure that the Convention was implemented for all persons with disabilities, including the most marginalized and underrepresented. Unfortunately, such a paradigm shift was not yet attainable for many persons with disabilities worldwide. As the world grappled with issues at the intersection of health and disability, particularly mental health and non-communicable diseases, it should be recalled that the social model on disability and the internationally agreed standards under the Convention were non-negotiable. Any discourse on health equity, including on mental health, must be underpinned by the human rights set out under the Convention, and not on a medical model-based approach.

53. The risk of undoing some of the progress made on the inclusion of persons with disabilities was very real. Fifteen years after the Convention had come into force, continuing to ask how the world responded to the diversity of all persons with disabilities was key. That question was acutely relevant as the world prepared to discuss the acceleration of the Sustainable Development Goals and make preparations for the Summit of the Future. Disability inclusion was still not yet considered to be a fundamental principle underpinning policymaking and programming. When the Secretary-General had said that it was time to sound the alarm for the Goals, that alarm must be sounded even louder for persons with disabilities.

54. Unjust systems would only lead to unjust outcomes. It was time for concrete actions, transformative shifts and systemic changes, as well as an intersectional approach to disability inclusion. Data were needed to drive inclusive policymaking, in addition to dedicated funding for inclusive development and a people-centred approach that built on the principle of meaningful participation of organizations of persons with disabilities, as enshrined in the Convention. She asked everyone to consider what could be done differently to create an accessible and inclusive world and to address the root causes of exclusion as experienced by persons with disabilities.

55. **Mr. Quinn** (Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities), panellist, speaking via video link, said that the main value of the Conference of States Parties was to have a space where all stakeholders could share their perspectives and work together towards solutions to the challenges and obstacles they faced. He looked forward to being briefed on the discussions held on the topic of risks and opportunities faced by persons with disabilities in the context of artificial intelligence, and on how that new force could be harnessed. Artificial intelligence must also be included in the debate on ensuring that underrepresented groups were heard.

56. In that connection, it was also important to define underrepresented groups. In the past, they were predominantly considered in terms of diagnostic categories of disability, whether physical, sensory, psychosocial or other. A more situational sense of who was underrepresented was also necessary, by looking at exclusionary processes in various domains and who they impacted. For example, whole categories of persons with disabilities were beginning to be liberated worldwide from institutionalization and legal incapacity. Their long-neglected voices still needed to be heard, especially in relation to the modernization of social services and care systems.

57. Refugees and internally displaced persons with disabilities, as well as civilian victims of armed conflict with disabilities, were rarely heard. Given that the latter comprised an average of 15 per cent of any civilian population, that situation was unacceptable. Persons with disabilities also held key insights into inclusion, which could contribute towards peacebuilding processes. However, they appeared to be systematically excluded from most peacebuilding processes worldwide. Moreover, alliances across civil society groups, which were central to any process of change, had traditionally been fraught when related to disability. The systemic lack of opportunities to build coalitions and alliances also reduced the voice of persons with disabilities.

58. The state of being hard to reach went beyond having a disability; it also meant that traditional processes for ensuring that voices were heard were not adequately adapted. Such a lack of inclusivity affected everyone. As observed by many, the disability rights agenda overlapped with the debate on democratization. The challenge was finding ways to eliminate the variables that prevented certain voices from being heard. Not only did the technical difficulties accompanying particular disabilities need to be addressed, but also the legacy of exclusion and invisibility affecting persons with disabilities in various domains. Consideration of the link between democracy and disability was also necessary. Greater engagement meant better decision-making processes and outcomes. Enhanced engagement also led to more responsive governance for the people. For that reason, the alliance between human rights, democracy and the rule of law was essential.

59. **Mr. Kuzmenkov** (Russian Federation) said that, the previous year, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities had held an interactive dialogue on the situation of persons with disabilities in Ukraine that had involved politicized accusations against his country, while there had been no criticism of the leadership of Ukraine. He asked whether there was an existing practice for conducting interactive dialogues that related to countries besides Ukraine. He also asked when the Committee would speak out in support of the Russian and Belarusian Paralympians who had long been denied the right to participate in international athletics competitions. Meanwhile, in March 2023, the Appeals Tribunal of the International Paralympic Committee had annulled the decision to suspend the Russian and Belarusian membership to the International Paralympic Committee. The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities should express its support for the athletes in question.

60. **Mr. Orozco** (Colombia) said that his Government was undertaking reforms and structural changes with a view to addressing social inequalities. He asked for recommendations for new institutional structures in Colombia, particularly to address the intersectionality between indigenous communities and persons with disabilities and between youth and people in general living with disabilities.

61. **Ms. Persaud** (Guyana) asked whether there were any resources on autism that could guide developing or underdeveloped countries, specifically in relation to the escalation in the number of cases of autism following the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, were there any effective communications and training tools for persons requiring standardized sign language that were available

to developing countries, and any data collection tools that could help with systems integration and could be freely provided to developing countries?

62. **Ms. Mozgovaya** (Belarus) said that, over the previous year, Belarus had been trying to ensure an impartial assessment by competent United Nations bodies of the decisions made by the International Paralympic Committee with regard to Belarusian and Russian athletes, as well as to evaluate their alignment with the Convention. Her delegation would welcome comments on that matter.

63. **Ms. Fefoame** (Chairperson, Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities), responding to the question from the representative of the Russian Federation, said that the Committee did not conduct informal consultations on countries, but rather invited States parties and interested agencies to discuss issues brought to its attention. Another informal consultation would take place later that year on dexterification. With regard to the issue relating to the Paralympics, she did not currently have an answer, and requested that the relevant question be put in writing; the Secretariat and the Committee would then discuss it and respond.

64. On the shrinking of resources and its effects on implementation, it was important to address issues related to disability in an intersecting manner, and a two-track approach should be taken to addressing funding needs. Meanwhile, various tools could be found on the OHCHR website; anyone who could not find the tools they needed should write to the Committee.

65. **Ms. Cisternas Reyes** (Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility), responding to the representative of Colombia, said that the Ministry of Equality and Equity to be established in that country should undertake a comparative and in-depth analysis of policies and strategies to ensure its success. With regard to the question from the representative of Guyana on autism, the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was a good forum for further exploration of the issue.

66. **Ms. Alambuya** (Civil Society Representative, President of Transforming Communities for Inclusion), responding to the question from the representative of Guyana, said that autism was an underrepresented disability and that raising awareness of underrepresented groups was key, in line with the Convention. A greater awareness of autism and the specific needs of persons with autism was therefore needed. In that regard, supporting persons with autism to ensure their voices were heard and allow them to have self-representation was also key.

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

(a) General debate (CRPD/CSP/2023/1, CRPD/CSP/2023/2, CRPD/CSP/2023/3 and CRPD/CSP/2023/4) (*continued*)

67. **Ms. Alostad** (Kuwait) said that her country had strived towards achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals through the work of its national commission for persons with disabilities. The call for “nothing about us without us” was key in order to guarantee the representation of persons with disabilities in the development of strategies for their inclusion within society. Kuwait had a total of 24 civil society organizations and sports clubs representing persons with disabilities.

68. Her Government had launched a campaign for the employment of persons with disabilities in collaboration with various stakeholders, providing training and internship programmes. Rules had also been established to ensure accessibility, which were implemented in collaboration with the relevant institutions. Legislation on technological accessibility had also been formulated, to facilitate access to online data for persons with disabilities.

69. **Mr. Kulháněk** (Czechia) said that in September 2022, during its presidency of the Council of the European Union, Czechia had held a conference on the integration of persons with disabilities into the labour market. In order to address mobility issues for persons with disabilities, his Government had systematically removed barriers and ensured the accessibility of public offices, schools, cultural facilities, transport and infrastructure. Analysis had also been conducted of all governmental office buildings, the results of which would be published on the Government’s website. The Czech national strategy for the development of social services for the period 2016–2025 included support for moving people from institutional care to community care, reducing the powers of the former and developing a network of community-based outpatient and low-capacity residential services.

70. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, together with relevant stakeholders, had drafted an action plan for the deinstitutionalization of social services for the period 2023–2025. Its main objectives included reducing the number of people living in institutional care; transforming institutional social services into community-based services, and providing support for the latter; and supporting psychiatric care reform. His country had also shown solidarity with the people of Ukraine affected by the Russian aggression,

and over 480,000 Ukrainian refugees had received temporary protection visas in Czechia.

71. **Mr. Tun** (Myanmar) said that Myanmar had adopted its national social protection strategy plan in 2014, enacted a law on the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities in 2015 and established a national committee on the rights of persons with disabilities in 2017. Equality, non-discrimination and socioeconomic inclusion of persons with disabilities were national priorities. While his Government had incorporated disability into its development agenda, the COVID-19 pandemic had created significant challenges for vulnerable groups. Those challenges had been exacerbated by the illegal military coup in February 2021 and related atrocities, which had resulted in increased numbers of persons with disabilities. Vulnerable groups were in need of multidimensional support, as they were particularly at risk and required immediate access to humanitarian assistance.

72. The immediate and concrete support of the international community was needed to return Myanmar to democracy in line with the aspirations of its people. The establishment of democracy was the only way that his country would be able to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities and all its people, who had been suffering tremendously under the military dictatorship.

73. **Ms. Mocanu** (Romania) said that the achievements of the National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities included its support for deinstitutionalization; reinforcement of the network for social services; boosting employment for persons with disabilities; better regulation and simplification, particularly in terms of capacity-building for local authorities to deliver social services; and the enhancement of legal representation for persons with disabilities through legislative amendments that reflected a new perspective on guardianship.

74. In April 2023, Romania had adopted a new law that increased accessibility for persons with disabilities by means of new technologies. The aim was to ensure independent living and integration into the community, including through access to public services. Her Government was also ensuring that no one was left offline. The national disability management system responsible for the collection and real-time processing of information on disability had been integrated into the Government's digital cloud services. Romania had also co-organized a side event on digital accessibility, paying special attention to communicating with persons with

disabilities and sharing national good practices related to alert systems in the event of emergencies.

75. **Ms. Silva** (Angola) said that despite the progress made under the Convention and the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, much remained to be done in terms of protecting persons with disabilities in conflict situations. In Angola, the number of persons with disabilities was estimated to be over 600,000, mainly due to four decades of internal conflict. With regard to the social inclusion of persons with disabilities in her country, Angola had ratified the Convention and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa. It had also established a law on accessibility, in addition to existing legislation promoting the rights of women with disabilities and providing guidance with regard to education on sexual and reproductive health. Her Government had recently adopted a strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities, to be included in its national programme for inclusion and accessibility 2022–2027, as well as its national programme to support persons with albinism.

76. **Ms. Nabeta** (Uganda) said that the Convention had provided Uganda with a broad framework to develop legislation, policies and programmes that aimed to improve the lives of persons with disabilities. The 2020 Persons with Disabilities Act had adopted a comprehensive definition of disability, which included physical, mental and sensory impairments, as well as environmental barriers that limited the participation of individuals in society on an equal basis with others. The Act recognized the importance of sexual and reproductive health for persons with disabilities, especially women and girls. Regrettably, there were continued instances of sexual and gender-based violence targeting women and girls with disabilities, particularly those with intellectual disabilities. Her Government had therefore collaborated with UNFPA and UNICEF to establish a national gender-based violence call centre for the reporting of cases and the provision of support to victims.

77. An estimated 12.4 per cent of the population had a disability, and inclusion of persons with disabilities in programmes and governance had become a priority, with a view to ensuring their meaningful participation. In order to further align its policies with the Convention, her Government had also formulated its Revised National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2022, which served as a framework to deliver essential services to persons with disabilities and strengthen their rights.

78. **Mr. Segura Aragón** (El Salvador) said that his country was implementing its national priorities for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in collaboration with key institutions. El Salvador had worked to fully address the needs of persons with disabilities, including in its comprehensive health-care system since 2019 and its adoption of a comprehensive health-care model in 2021. National institutions were taking a cross-cutting approach in addressing issues to improve the quality of life of persons with disabilities, including by ensuring access to sexual and reproductive health care services for women and working towards the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases. Meanwhile, computers had been distributed to 2,000 students attending special education facilities, taking into account the specific needs of each individual. It was important to review progress in terms of compliance with the 2030 Agenda, with a view to ensuring that no one was left behind.

79. **Mr. Sabbagh** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that, in recognition of the Convention, his Government had established a legal framework that guaranteed all human rights for persons with disabilities, took measures to prohibit discrimination against them in all areas, and ensured their participation in the development of policies and legislation for their full inclusion in the community through the preparation of a national disability strategy for 2022–2023.

80. His country offered programmes for the rehabilitation of persons with mental and hearing impairments, as well for the provision of prosthetics. Support was also provided to the businesses of persons with disabilities, including by offering concessional loans. His Government also collaborated with international and civil society organizations that provided care and financial and technical support to persons with disabilities, as well as those working to ensure awareness-raising, inclusion and the training of staff.

81. The terrorist war against his country had a grave impact on persons with disabilities. Foreign aggression had led to increasing and compounded cases of disability, in addition to the heightened vulnerability of civilians, particularly children, to the threat of explosives and mines left by terrorist groups. The unilateral coercive measures imposed by several Western countries against his country had also led to a decline in the quality of services provided to persons with disabilities and decreased access to prosthetics, wheelchairs and other medical equipment, which aggravated their suffering.

82. **The representative of Indonesia** said that his country had achieved several milestones related to the

rights of persons with disabilities, including the establishment of an independent national commission to observe adherence to national commitments and the holding of a comprehensive and constructive dialogue with the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities regarding the implementation of the Convention. In order to harmonize international policies and strategies with actions, the integration of data was vital. In Indonesia, data collection on persons with disabilities was mainstreamed within national integrated welfare data, which allowed the Government to focus on the well-being of such persons and their families in detail.

83. The mainstreaming and integration of the rights of persons with disabilities must be part of all development stages of policies and plans. For example, the inclusion of a disabilities response perspective in disaster risk reduction agendas was key, particularly in the design of early warning systems. A paradigm shift was also needed in order to view persons with disabilities as more than mere policy beneficiaries.

84. In recent years, Indonesia had implemented a training and mentorship programme that aimed to strengthen the capacities and skills of people to enable them to contribute towards economic development. The programme had resulted in a creative economy and family-based micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, and had reached 10,000 families across the country, including a significant number of persons with disabilities. Indonesia remained committed to sharing its experience at the regional and global levels.

85. **Ms. Beshkova** (Bulgaria) said that the policies of her country were based on the steadfast commitment to supporting persons with disabilities in the fields of employment and accessibility. The implementation of a national strategy for persons with disabilities for the period 2021–2030 played a key role in that regard, reflecting the political will to implement the commitments of the Convention and recommendations by the Committee.

86. Since 2019, a national legal instrument had been in place in Bulgaria on the rights of persons with disabilities, providing a normative and institutional framework for establishing a national council for persons with disabilities, which promoted and monitored the implementation of the provisions of the Convention at the national level. A law was also in place that established a financial support system for personal assistants, increasing the ability of persons with disabilities to exercise their rights and enhancing their opportunities for social inclusion. Since 2021, Bulgaria

had also enacted a law to promote the recognition of Bulgarian sign language.

87. **Ms. Ramírez** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), speaking via video link, said that through its national plan to address issues faced by persons with disabilities, her country had a specific action agenda with short- and medium-term goals. In the light of unilateral coercive measures, her Government was making every effort to ensure the gradual, progressive and comprehensive recovery of the State.

88. Her Government had established specific laws for various disabilities, including a special law for workers with disabilities and comprehensive care laws for persons with autism and for persons who were deaf or hard of hearing. It was also working towards ensuring compliance with the technical norms and regulations on accessibility, proper treatment, and inclusion in the labour market. Recently, a community training school had been established to promote the national training plan for community committees of persons with disabilities, their families, social movements and the general public. A monitoring committee had also been set up to discuss the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, with a view to fully implementing the provisions enshrined in the Convention.

89. **Mr. Nunes** (Timor-Leste) said that the Constitution of Timor-Leste guaranteed that its citizens with disabilities had equal rights and that no citizens could be discriminated against on the grounds of physical or mental conditions. His Government had also taken measures to provide assistance to persons with disabilities, to enable them to lead a dignified life, participate in social activities and enjoy their rights and freedom. Policies and programmes had been formulated and implemented to ensure the rights of persons with disabilities based on a non-discriminatory approach. His Government granted subsidies to persons with disabilities and had established therapy centres and a national action plan for the period 2021–2030. It was also in the process of establishing a national council for persons with disabilities, with a view to promoting, protecting and ensuring the full enjoyment of their human rights.

Agenda item 6: Decisions by the Conference of States Parties

90. **The President** drew the attention of the Conference to the fact that a document containing the text of the three draft decisions had been circulated to all delegations. Consensus had been sought by 15 May

2023. Since no objection had been received, he invited States parties to endorse those proposals.

Draft decision 1: Venue and timing of the seventeenth session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Draft decision 2: Resources and support for the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Draft decision 3: Request to the Secretary-General to transmit the report of the sixteenth session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

91. *Draft decisions 1, 2 and 3 were adopted.*

Agenda item 7: Closure of the session

92. **Ms. Lortkipanidze** (Georgia), speaking as Vice-President, said that the selection of “Ensuring equal access to and accessibility of sexual and reproductive health services for persons with disabilities” as one of the sub-themes of the Conference was a historic achievement, as it was the first time that sexual and reproductive health and rights had been discussed during a round table of the Conference. Taking stock of all the initiatives and innovative ideas proposed during the Conference was a joint responsibility, as was translating them into concrete actions to ensure delivery on the promise to leave no one behind, including persons with disabilities.

93. **Mr. Kezas** (Greece), speaking as Vice-President, said that during the Conference’s earlier round table on digital accessibility for persons with disabilities, Mr. Stephanidis, President of the National Accessibility Authority of Greece, had stressed the need to ensure that accessibility was achieved in practice, instead of merely being the letter of the law, which was particularly relevant given the existence of gaps between enacted policies and practices. Such gaps were likely to further increase, given the uncharted territory of digital accessibility, emerging technologies, artificial intelligence and intelligent environments. In light of that, embracing the spirit of the law was also necessary, while significantly accelerating actions to achieve full implementation of the appropriate legislation.

94. **Ms. Thompson Ramirez** (Panama), speaking as Vice-President and also on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, said that discussion of issues of access to sexual and reproductive health-care rights for persons with disabilities should be the first of many, in order to ensure such issues were resolved, particularly for women and girls. The sub-theme of

digital accessibility for persons with disabilities was also highly important, particularly in terms of how such tools could lead to enhanced opportunities for education, employment, social inclusion and political participation, as well as access to public services and information.

95. In reference to the sub-theme on reaching the underrepresented groups of persons with disabilities, there was still an enormous debt to pay to the community of persons with disabilities. Sixteen years earlier, the signing and ratification of the Convention and its Optional Protocol by Panama had marked a crucial turning point in its commitment to create an inclusive and fair society, as attested to by the participation of its National Secretariat for Disability in the current Conference. Her delegation would continue its efforts to strengthen the work of the Conference and the multilateral space to ensure that the Conference remained a key platform for persons with disabilities to have their voices heard, as well as for cooperation.

96. **Mr. Gunaratna** (Sri Lanka), speaking as Vice-President, said that while there was much more work to do in order to implement the Convention, there was also forward momentum in terms of creating vital awareness of the important role of persons with disabilities in contributing to their respective societies. Moreover, it was incumbent on all States to ensure that persons with disabilities were given that opportunity to contribute. The annual deliberations of the Conference had ensured that the rights of persons with disabilities were reflected in the global discourse in multiple forums.

97. While change was under way, it needed to be accelerated. There was thus a collective responsibility for participants to take the key messages from the Conference back to their countries, to facilitate implementation on the ground and to ensure that all persons with disabilities could participate as equal and dignified partners in the daily life of societies.

98. **The President** paid tribute to the memory of all leading international disability activists who had passed away since the previous Conference.

99. *At the invitation of the Chair, the members of the Committee observed a minute of silence.*

100. **The President** said that the sixteenth session of the Conference had demonstrated the renewed energy among States parties, United Nations entities and civil society with regard to multilateral processes. The session had also served as a reminder of the fundamental importance of the Convention and the need to continue advancing the rights of persons with disabilities. One of the milestones achieved had been the discussion of the

sexual and reproductive health-care rights of persons with disabilities. Technological advances, including in the digital spheres, had promising potential but also posed challenges for States parties in terms of meeting the needs of persons with disabilities. Digital accessibility, bridging the existing digital divides and achieving digital inclusion for all had also been discussed. The Conference had also marked a milestone by tackling the issue of underrepresentation of certain groups of persons with disabilities who had been excluded from the benefits arising from the implementation of the Convention. That topic had been addressed in order to highlight the necessity of integrating the diverse voices of persons with disabilities when devising policies and strategies for implementation of the Convention.

101. The current session had marked a clear path forward for future sessions and on the most pressing issues, with the goal of achieving the full inclusion and empowerment of all persons with disabilities. He thanked the Vice-Presidents of the Conference for their participation, the Secretariat and its partners who had provided sign-language interpretation, closed caption and accessible documentation, as well as the organizations of persons with disabilities and members of civil society for their tireless commitment to the Convention and to the Conference.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.