



Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

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New York, 11–13 June 2024

Summary record of the 5th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 13 June 2024, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. Sekeris (Acting Vice-President) (Greece)

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In the absence of Mr. Ladeb (Tunisia), Mr. Sekeris (Greece), Acting Vice-President, took the Chair.

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

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

(a) General debate (continued)

1. **Mr. Bendjama** (Algeria) said that his country's policy on protecting the rights of persons of disabilities was in line with the relevant international treaties. Under its comprehensive policy, persons with disabilities received specialized education, and there were measures in place to enable their integration in the economic, sporting and social spheres, as well as to support their independence. Children with disabilities benefited from specialized educational institutions, which offered tailored programmes that included educational, psychological and health services, while supporting their integration into regular schools.
2. Algeria also had a comprehensive, cross-cutting policy on vocational integration for persons with disabilities, which helped them to find decent work and obtain sustainable livelihoods. In terms of equality of opportunity, there were arrangements in place that supported persons with disabilities to pass vocational competitions, including by allowing extended examinations and the presence of sign language interpreters. In addition, the Government was focusing on engaging with persons with disabilities by providing them with support to establish their own businesses. It had launched an electronic guide on economic integration and inclusion for 2024, designed to support persons with disabilities with their own economic ventures.
3. Algeria had social protection systems, under which it provided assistive equipment, specialized materials and free transport to persons with disabilities. They and their families were also eligible for government grants aimed at allowing them to live in dignity and facilitating their access to the social, cultural and economic fields.
4. **Ms. Asaju** (Nigeria) said that persons with disabilities continued to be marginalized. Discrimination and stigma prevented them from participating fully and effectively in all aspects of public life, including education and employment. The entrenched exclusion of persons with disabilities had implications for both national and global development. In that regard, the lack of disability-disaggregated data posed a challenge. Further attention and research were needed with respect to specific disadvantaged groups, including deafblind persons, refugees, migrants, asylum-seekers, displaced persons with disabilities, persons with disabilities living in rural areas, persons on the autism spectrum and persons with intellectual disabilities.
5. The Government of Nigeria had taken steps to promote and protect the inalienable rights of persons with disabilities, including, in 2018, by passing an Act prohibiting all forms of discrimination against them. Under the Act, discrimination was punishable by a fine, imprisonment, or both, depending on its gravity. The Act also protected the rights of persons with disabilities in relation to education and health care and gave them priority status with respect to accommodation, emergencies and public transport. It required that persons with disabilities account for at least 5 per cent of the staff of all public organizations and set a five-year time limit for all government buildings to become accessible to persons with disabilities.
6. However, despite such progress, persons with disabilities continued to face numerous barriers, including difficulties in access to physical and online environments, social exclusion, a lack of assistive technology and barriers to health care and in the workplace. The Sustainable Development Goals would remain a mirage without the full, meaningful and equal participation of all. Nigeria was

therefore committed to ensuring that persons with disabilities, including women and girls and older persons, were able to fully enjoy their rights.

7. **Ms. Mozgovaya** (Belarus) said that her country was working systemically to socially integrate persons with disabilities and improve their standard of living. The authorities were seeking to establish a comprehensive inter-agency approach to social integration, which began at birth and supported persons with disabilities until they became financially independent. To that end, Belarus had a national plan of action to implement the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, coordinated by an inter-agency council on the rights of persons with disabilities. Early in 2023, an Act on the rights of persons with disabilities and their social integration had come into force. The Act, which had been drafted in consultation with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), served to strengthen protection of their rights and freedoms, including by prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of disability. In practice that meant, for example, that there must be easy access to social facilities and residential areas, transport and other infrastructure, as well as access to information.

8. Belarus had a system of employment quotas for persons with individual disabilities. It also had measures to support families looking after children with disabilities, including financial assistance in the form of grants and other benefits. In accordance with the principle of inclusive education, Belarus sought to improve the lives of children with disabilities through early intervention programmes, provided in rehabilitation and education centres. A priority of the national strategy for young people was to improve and adapt rehabilitation centres for young people with special needs to ensure that they could live independent lives, including through youth's involvement in fitness and sports.

9. **Ms. Caska** (Observer for Down Syndrome New South Wales) said that Australia had a national disability insurance scheme and a range of enabling strategies designed to provide humanity, certainty and equity to persons with disabilities. Australian civil society was very active in advocating for persons with disabilities and the Government was receptive.

10. At the current session, she was representing friends with Down syndrome and her sister, who had a severe intellectual disability and autism. Unfortunately, her sister was unable to be present because the Secretariat building and the conference room itself were not accessible to her. Disability was not homogenous; those with intellectual disability were falling far behind those with other types of disability across all metrics. However, the Convention was not reserved for the vocal and the visible, and persons with disabilities should not be expected to adapt – instead it was the systems that must be adapted.

11. Turning to subtheme 1 of the session, “International cooperation to promote technology innovations and transfer for an inclusive future”, she said that the importance of technology in bridging the communication and accessibility divide could not be overestimated, especially for those persons with disabilities who might not have a voice but who had much to say.

12. With respect to subtheme 2, “Persons with disabilities in situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies”, it was deeply shocking that people with Down syndrome and other intellectual disabilities were being shot in war zones simply because they did not understand instructions, and despite the existence of a United Nations resolution on easy-to-understand communication.

13. With regard to subtheme 3, “Promoting the rights of persons with disabilities to decent work and sustainable livelihood”, there was a need for a paradigm shift – employment was not a “nice” thing to do “for” persons with disabilities, but rather an

inherent right of all people. While the employment rate of persons without disabilities in Australia was 83 per cent, it was only 29 per cent for persons with an intellectual disability. Worldwide, Governments and public and private enterprises were failing to harness the talents and skills of 1.3 billion potential leaders, politicians and employees, who were ready, willing and able. Economic modelling had indicated that closing the employment gap for persons with disabilities could increase the gross domestic product of Australia by \$43 billion in just 10 years.

14. It was important to address the intersections between health, education and transport. Her sister had been sexually assaulted by a train worker on a daily basis, for months, eventually leading to her leaving her job – and that was not unusual. One in two women with an intellectual disability was sexually abused. Accelerated action was overdue. The United Nations and States parties to the Convention must engage with civil society, prioritize action, openly share data on progress and, most importantly, listen to all persons with disabilities.

15. **Mr. Rashal** (Israel) said that during the last year, his Government had introduced a requirement that persons with disabilities be adequately represented in government-owned companies, which had the potential to create tens of thousands of jobs. Israel was also continuing to develop regulations on the accessibility of health services and cultural and sporting events. Following its first appearance before the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in August 2023, Israel had begun to construct a national action plan for the full integration of persons with disabilities in every area specified in the Convention.

16. During his third year as Commissioner for Equal Rights of Persons with Disabilities, his country had endured a horrific terror attack, which had affected everyone in Israel, including persons with disabilities. Hamas had committed atrocities indiscriminately, including against persons with disabilities of all ages, from older persons to infants. Prior to 7 October 2023, the number of persons with disabilities in Israel categorized as “victims of hostile actions”, meaning those affected by terrorism or war, had been approximately 8,800; there were now approximately 64,000. The attack had required Israel to urgently shift its focus and devote its resources to, inter alia, emergency treatment and assistance for persons with disabilities, the establishment of accessible shelters and the distribution of special alert bracelets for the hearing impaired, all in accordance with article 11 of the Convention.

17. It was shocking that Hamas, which was responsible for the situation in Israel and in Gaza, was not being condemned or put under pressure by the United Nations. In addition to the arsenal of hostile actions that the Organization already employed against Israel, it was now deliberately disseminating completely false and baseless accusations. The statements delivered at the current session demonstrated that many States had taken the side of a terrorist regime. His delegation urged all States parties to condemn Hamas, which was responsible for the grave casualties and the entire situation in Gaza, and to call for the immediate return of Israeli hostages and the cessation of holding women and children as human shields.

18. **Ms. Schwalger** (New Zealand) said that her delegation wished to acknowledge the recent passing of Sir Robert Martin, the first person with a learning disability ever to have been elected to any United Nations body. He had brought the lived experience of persons with disabilities to his domestic and international advocacy, reflecting the “nothing about us without us” mantra.

19. New Zealand would continue to work hard to achieve an inclusive future, in line with its national disability strategy, and to champion disability rights globally. It was proud to be co-chairing the Group of Friends of Persons with Disabilities alongside Mexico, and co-leading resolutions on the rights of persons with disabilities in

situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies in the Third Committee, and on support systems for community inclusion of persons with disabilities in the Human Rights Council. New Zealand welcomed the progress made towards the implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, and called for accessibility throughout the United Nations system, as well as for the leadership and the involvement of persons with disabilities in the implementation of the strategy.

20. New Zealand particularly welcomed the focus of the current session on rethinking disability inclusion ahead of the Summit of the Future. Practices and values which had been critical to the development of the Convention, including equality of opportunity for all, involvement in decision-making of those most affected and the development of a human-rights-based global infrastructure, all remained instructive, and were perhaps more important than ever before in view of the wider geopolitical context. States should reflect those practices and values in the processes and outcomes that lay ahead in the remainder of 2024. Sir Martin would also have challenged States parties to focus on the potential of the international system. He had always been honest about the challenges facing persons with disabilities, and had sought a future in which the past was neither forgotten nor replicated. In his memory, New Zealand invited all participants to commit to the systems and processes that would make true equality a reality.

21. **Ms. Znoj** (Slovenia) said that each country must strive to implement the international agreements, including the Convention, which served as the foundation for international cooperation among the international community. Rethinking disability inclusion was not just a moral imperative, it was also a strategic necessity. Disability was not solely a medical issue, but also a social, economic and political one, and it was necessary to embrace perspectives that went beyond a simple medical definition. Therefore, at the both the national and global levels, priority must be given to addressing the individual needs of persons with disabilities and recognizing their contribution to inclusive societies.

22. Technology was advancing at a breathtaking pace, with implications for the involvement of persons with disabilities in society, in particular in the job market, where new technologies were reshaping professions and work processes. In cooperation with disability organizations, research institutions and other civil society organizations, Slovenia was actively seeking solutions to issues related to accessibility, employment and digitalization. For example, the Faculty of Electrical Engineering of the University of Indiana, in cooperation with the Geodetic Institute of Slovenia, was working on a project that involved exploring the everyday challenges faced by persons with disabilities in various contexts. The goal of the project was to enhance the day-to-day experience of persons with disabilities with the introduction of new tools, devices and advanced technological solutions.

23. **Mr. Cox** (Observer for Down Syndrome Australia) said that many persons with intellectual disabilities did not work, and those who did were often in workshops or factories that only hired persons with disabilities. In segregated employment, persons with disabilities were often paid well below the minimum wage, in addition to being socially excluded. However, persons with intellectual disabilities had the right to work on an equal basis with others in open employment. More employers needed to understand and commit to inclusion; they needed to see the value in offering real jobs with real wages to persons with intellectual disabilities. Segregated employment providers should be supported to help their employees move into open employment. The disability royal commission of Australia had recently recommended a reform to the disability employment support system and was developing a road map to get more people into open employment and raise subminimum wages.

24. Organizations like Down Syndrome Australia were delivering improvements. However, they could achieve more, and the Government should also be doing more. Self-advocates should be involved at every stage in any work to make employment more inclusive. Everyone had the right to a meaningful job, a supportive environment and a decent wage. He hoped for a world where persons with intellectual disabilities had the same opportunities as everyone else in work and in life.

25. **Mr. Hinkson** (Barbados) said that in June 2022, the Cabinet of Barbados had established a national advisory committee for improving the lives of persons with disabilities. The committee had been mandated to formulate a national disability policy and craft a draft bill on the rights of persons with disabilities, which it had done by March 2023. In September 2023, the Cabinet had approved a comprehensive national policy for the period 2023–2030, which represented a progressive, multifaceted and targeted effort to protect, advance and promote the human rights and fundamental freedoms of those living with some form of disability in the Barbados – estimated at 7 per cent of the population.

26. His Government was committed to eliminating all forms of discrimination and barriers to the realization of the full potential and personal development of persons with disabilities. Accordingly, it was ensuring that persons with disabilities had access to decent housing and benefits such as loans for entrepreneurial ventures, leading to their more meaningful participation and inclusion in all aspects of life. The Government provided assistive equipment to persons with disabilities and had a policy on retrofitting the homes of financially vulnerable persons with disabilities.

27. In her budget for 2024, the Prime Minister of Barbados had expanded social security support to cover a wider range of disabilities. The Government had also pledged to draft new legislation to comply with the international obligations of Barbados under the Convention. Once enacted, the legislation would constitute a legal framework for free, inclusive educational and training opportunities, accessible health care, affirmative action principles in employment, affordable and reliable transportation, reasonable access to buildings and protection from natural disasters. In addition, the imminent transformation of the institutional framework for social services would enable persons with disabilities to access a wider range of resources than they currently could, with less bureaucracy.

28. **Mr. Losada Torres-Quevedo** (Spain) said that in February 2024, his Government had reformed article 49 of the 1978 Constitution, which was dedicated to protecting the rights of persons with disabilities. The dignity of the human person and the free development of people's personalities were enshrined in the Constitution as cornerstones of democracy and the rule of law. Spain would uphold the fundamental rights and freedoms recognized under its Constitution.

29. Moreover, in recent years, national and regional legislation had been adapted to comply with the Convention, while civil society groups had been advocating the adaptation of article 49 of the Constitution to reflect the new social reality and international norms. There had also been growing recognition of the particular needs of women and minors with disabilities in Spain. In that context, it had become clear that both the wording and content of article 49 needed updating. The new drafting of article 49 emphasized effective freedom and equality, complete personal autonomy, social inclusion and universally accessible environments. It also incorporated a feminist perspective and the protection of children's and young people's rights. The reform was the first ever social reform of the Constitution, and it enshrined the cross-cutting nature, inclusivity and universality of the rights of persons with disabilities. The reform was an example of civil society and the State working together to expand social rights.

30. Lastly, recalling that war was responsible for disabilities on a large scale, his delegation urged the prioritization of peace and inclusion.

31. **Mr. Rangsesawang** (Thailand) said that for over three decades, his country had been committed to caring for and fostering the development of persons with disabilities. It had shifted its focus from rehabilitation to empowerment, and ensured that persons with disabilities were able to exercise their rights and benefit from State welfare programmes on an equal footing with others. Thailand had a new disability registration system and was engaging families in caring for persons with disabilities through a “foster family” programme, an alternative to institutional care. There were also community disability service centres, established by local administrative organizations and organizations of persons with disabilities.

32. Educational institutions in Thailand had developed vocational courses for persons with disabilities and their families, resulting in significant increases in the number of persons with disabilities in employment in both the private and public sectors. The Government provided persons with disabilities with assistive devices and facilities, auxiliary aids and personal assistants, as needed, with a view to leaving no one behind.

33. **Mr. Valido Martínez** (Cuba) said that in a world where inclusion and respect for diversity were fundamental, Cuba strove to remain a benchmark for the protection and care of persons with disabilities. Its Constitution, updated in 2019, clearly reflected that commitment with enhanced legal protections for the rights of persons with disabilities, who benefited from a solid institutional framework, public policies and critical resources aimed at ensuring their full inclusion and participation in society. The recent establishment of the Cuban Association of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities was a milestone for his country. The Association would join other organizations working assiduously to protect the rights and promote the independence and dignity of persons with disabilities. The new Family Code, alongside other legislation in force, protected the sexual, reproductive and family rights of persons with disabilities, whose well-being and holistic development were priorities for Cuba.

34. The economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed against Cuba for over six decades by the Government of the United States of America and its unilateral designation of Cuba as a State sponsor of terrorism significantly impeded his country’s access to essential resources, including those needed to assist persons with disabilities. However, in spite of the difficulties imposed by the United States, Cuba continued to prioritize persons with disabilities in the distribution of resources, providing prostheses, hearing aids, artificial limbs, wheelchairs and canes free of charge to those who needed them. His Government was committed to ensuring that every independent person was able to live independently, with the same opportunities as others and the chance to contribute fully to society. Persons with disabilities were not only the beneficiaries of social programmes in Cuba, but they were also active agents of change. Their voices were heard and respected and their participation was valued and encouraged.

35. **Ms. López** (Nicaragua), in a pre-recorded video statement, said that her Government was committed to continuing to restore the human rights of families in Nicaragua, and particularly those of the most vulnerable groups. For 16 years, neoliberal policies imposed in her country had led to the exclusion and marginalization of persons with disabilities and the denial of their civil and political rights, and well as their rights to employment, education and health care. The Government of Reconciliation and National Unity, in line with its equity- and complementarity-based approach, was fostering loving and responsible care for

children and adults with disabilities, thereby strengthening personal and family relationships for more dignified lives.

36. Those with different capabilities were listened to and respected and enjoyed legal and governmental support. For instance, in 2011 the Government had adopted an Act on equality, inclusion and non-discrimination. In addition, through the Ministry of Health, it was supporting valuable programmes, including “We all have a voice”, which was focused on the needs of persons with disabilities and their families. Persons with disabilities could receive high-quality care free of charge at physical therapy and rehabilitation centres throughout the country. Nicaragua took a holistic approach to education and ensured that students with special educational needs, whether related to a disability or not, were included. There were 25 public schools for special education nationwide.

37. The right of persons with disabilities to participate in political decision-making on an equal footing with others was protected in Nicaragua. The restitution of such rights was bolstered with budgetary allocations for dedicated programmes, demonstrating her Government’s commitment to promoting a culture of peace and hope and building an inclusive, hate-free society.

38. **Mr. Reeves** (Observer for the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment) said that in recent decades, mathematics instruction for blind learners had become much more critical due to at least two new factors. First, as more blind children were enrolled in inclusive educational settings, they were usually taught by classroom teachers with limited experience in adapting learning materials for children with visual impairments. At the same time, advances in assistive technology were opening up a new world of educational and career opportunities for blind persons, opportunities that most often required a strong grounding in mathematical concepts.

39. In order to address that issue, the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment and the Overbrook-Nippon Network on Educational Technology had developed a publication entitled *Mathematics Made Easy for Children with Visual Impairment*, which was available for free download. The publication was accompanied by over 600 teacher-made videos to support effective mathematics instruction. Over the last decade, that Council had also led an initiative that demonstrated that including persons with visual impairment in higher education could affect systemic changes in the blindness sector. With support from the Nippon Foundation, the Council had facilitated higher education for over 3,000 visually impaired students in East Asian countries, who had become role models. The initiative had led not only to an increase in the enrolment of children with visual impairment at all levels of education, but was also changing public perceptions about visual disability. Education focused on mathematics and higher education for blind students would ensure inclusion, supporting the global goal of leaving no one behind. The Council and the Overbrook School for the Blind were willing to work with communities globally to replicate those positive experiences in other parts of the world.

40. **Ms. Herrera** (El Salvador) said that it was important to acknowledge the commitment and role of the members of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, who oversaw the implementation of the Convention, considered State party reports and issued recommendations to support the development of strategies that would foster the development of persons with disabilities and their families.

41. Her Government was currently implementing a strategic plan aimed at eliminating barriers and strengthening equality of opportunity. The plan had eight focus areas, including digital transformation and access to information and communications technologies. El Salvador also had an inclusive education system:

starting in 2022, students with disabilities in both special and regular education had been provided with custom-adapted technological equipment. Furthermore, El Salvador had a national plan for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the world of work, which was focused on creating decent work opportunities, fostering independence and improving the quality of life of persons with disabilities and their families. Under the plan, more than 5,000 persons with disabilities had been employed in various businesses.

42. Under its strategic plan to eliminate barriers, the Government had been working progressively to lay the foundations of an inclusive society with spaces and opportunities for active participation. The Government was emphasizing the value of early intervention that enabled persons with disabilities to reach their full potential, as well as the importance of recognizing persons with disabilities as subjects with rights. A key principle was the joint responsibility of families and caregivers, who played a significant role in developing the capabilities of persons with disabilities. El Salvador reaffirmed its interest in forming new partnerships that would facilitate the roll-out of inclusive intervention measures that would transform the lives of persons with disabilities and support their participation in various spheres of society.

43. **Mr. Kim Song** (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that his Government placed the interests of the people above all else and worked to ensure that all people enjoyed proud, dignified lives. It attached great importance to protecting the rights of persons with disabilities, as demonstrated by its adoption in 2003 of an Act on the protection of persons with disabilities. Since 1998, there had also been a central committee that served to coordinate the implementation of the policy on the rights of persons with disabilities, and in 2016, an additional national committee for the protection of persons with disabilities had been established. Under the oversight of those bodies, each person was placed in a position on the basis of his or her personality. The national rehabilitation centre for children with disabilities continued to offer education in different formats, including early special education, as well as conducting scientific and technical studies related to rehabilitation. All persons, including children, with disabilities, enjoyed happy lives as a result of the policies of his country's socialist system.

44. The Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea consistently sought to develop international cooperation and exchanges for the promotion and protection of human rights, including those of persons with disabilities. It remained committed to pursuing its people-centred policies for the improvement of the material and cultural well-being of persons with disabilities, and to fully complying with its obligations as a State party to the Convention.

45. **Ms. Calem-Sangiorgio** (Monaco) said that 1.3 billion people, or 16 per cent of the world's population, were living with a disability, and some 80 per cent of those disabilities were invisible. Rethinking disability inclusion, therefore, meant raising awareness, dispensing with clichés and breaking down prejudices. In December 2023, Monaco had launched a new national policy on the inclusion of persons with disabilities, with nine focus areas: awareness-raising of all types of disability; education and training; work and employment; housing and construction; mobility and accessibility; care and support; access to sport, culture and leisure activities; communication; and international recognition. Moreover, with a view to making Monaco a gold standard in terms of disability inclusion, the Government had proposed "Handipact", a whole-of-society pact aimed at ensuring that all actors were prepared to welcome, understand, recruit, educate, train and work with persons with disabilities. Communication, awareness and support were the watchwords of the new policy.

46. Measures had already been taken, including the establishment of a “nothing about us without us” network to identify challenges, suggest solutions and improve existing support; the establishment of a disability network within the Government; the testing of systems meant to be used by persons with disabilities; the centralization of information on disability at every stage of life on the government website, for enhanced accessibility; and the development of an employment guide for employees and employers. Ensuring that disability was known and understood by all was a necessary step in building an inclusive society. Monaco was making progress in that regard with a pragmatic policy that involved all the public- and private-sector actors who worked to meet the needs of persons with disabilities on a day-to-day basis.

47. At the Summit of the Future, Monaco would continue to promote sport as a tool for sustainable development. Sport was also an important component of the inclusion of persons with disabilities, beyond the mental and physical health benefits it provided.

48. **Mr. Martinez** (Ecuador) said that, in the context of rethinking disability inclusion in the current international juncture and ahead of the Summit of the Future, his Government considered it a priority to ensure that persons with disabilities fully enjoyed their rights, as protected by international legal instruments and national legislation. Ecuador remained committed to implementing the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The national development plan of Ecuador for the period 2024–2025 set out guidelines for the design and implementation of inclusive public policies. The plan was also aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Organizations of and for persons with disabilities and their families had been involved in the development of public policies related to disability that were set out in the national agenda for disability equality, a planning tool which was used in budgeting. The thematic areas of that agenda were aligned with the provisions of the Convention.

49. For Ecuador, it was important to promote technological innovation and transfer for an inclusive future, address risks and humanitarian emergencies and promote the rights of persons with disabilities to a dignified life, employment and sustainable livelihoods.

50. **Ms. Patel** (India) said that her country’s Constitution guaranteed equal rights to all persons, including persons with disabilities. India had also been one of the first countries to ratify the Convention, in 2007. It was home to an estimated 27 million persons with disabilities, who faced physical, financial and psychological challenges, which required comprehensive interventions. Thus, India had adopted legislation in 2016 expanding the number of recognized disability categories from 7 to 21 and increasing the quotas for persons with disabilities in government jobs and higher educational institutions.

51. Other significant initiatives included improvements to the accessibility of government buildings, public transport and airports; the establishment of seven national institutes for research and development related to the rehabilitation of persons with special needs; the provision of funds to persons with disabilities to promote their economic independence and self-employment ventures; and the establishment of the Office of the Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities. In addition, in the recently concluded general election, in which more than 600 million votes had been cast, a wide range of measures had been taken to make polling stations more inclusive and accessible. Arrangements had included improved access to polling stations, accessible toilets, separate entries and exits, Braille ballot guides, Braille-embossed electronic voting machines and voter slips, the provision of wheelchairs, free local public transport and priority entry for persons with disabilities.

52. **Ms. Fitzgibbon** (Observer for Keystone Human Services International) said that her NGO had over 50 years' experience implementing community alternatives to the institutionalization of children and adults with disabilities. Its work built on article 19 of the Convention, in which the right of persons with disabilities to live in the community was affirmed, and was driven by partnerships with self-advocates and representative organizations of persons with disabilities. The widespread adoption of the Convention and the Committee's adoption of its guidelines on deinstitutionalization, including in emergencies (CRPD/C/5) had been milestones for the disability movement. However, States' slow enactment of the guidelines and the continued reliance on institutions were preventing the true, meaningful inclusion of persons with disabilities. Institutionalization had a profound and long-lasting effect on the health, development and well-being of children with disabilities, but, without strong and inclusive community services, including support for families, institutions were too often seen as the only option.

53. Keystone's work had shown that the full community inclusion of persons with disabilities could come from the establishment of sustainable, inclusive community-based services, especially when designed with, rather than merely for, persons with disabilities; the mainstreaming of disability in policy frameworks; and the strengthening of self-advocacy platforms.

54. Keystone called on Member States to ensure the full participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities and their organizations in all efforts to implement the Convention; to support community living for all persons with disabilities, end all forms of institutionalization and establish inclusive and accessible community-based services; to transform systems of care for children with disabilities to fulfil every child's right to live with his or her family and community; and to leverage the expertise of family members and directly support professionals in those efforts. Ending segregation was not only possible, it was the only way forward.

55. **Ms. González Ulate** (Costa Rica), in a pre-recorded video statement, said that through inter-institutional coordination, and with civil society involvement, her Government had taken concrete steps towards the inclusion in the workforce of persons with disabilities. Measures included the strengthening of the national committee for employability and work; the implementation of an employability programme in coordination with Fundación ONCE para la Cooperación e Inclusión Social de Personas con Discapacidad, in which 15 large businesses were already taking part; and the establishment of direct impact targets as part of the national employability and human talent strategy.

56. Promoting the application of new technologies and knowledge was a priority for Costa Rica. It was important to be decisive in closing the digital gap, which was leaving the poorest persons with disabilities behind, and to promote an inclusive artificial intelligence for the creation of more human-centric markets that responded to people's diverse needs. States should also take action to ensure that assistive technology and support services were affordable, and that social protection systems were sustainable. Children and young people with disabilities should be part of those processes, so that their experience shaped the construction of an inclusive present and future. In Costa Rica, inclusive risk management entailed the participation of persons with disabilities in emergency planning, preparation and response activities.

57. **Mr. Kattanga** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that his Government sought to ensure that persons with disabilities enjoyed the same rights and privileges as other citizens. The Convention had provided his country with a framework for the development of legislation, policies and programmes aimed at improving the lives of persons with disabilities. For instance, in the Persons with Disabilities Act, the United Republic of Tanzania had adopted a comprehensive definition of disability, which

covered physical, mental and sensory impairments as well as environmental barriers that limited individual participation in society.

58. According to a 2022 census, 11.2 per cent of Tanzanians were living with a disability. His Government had therefore been prioritizing the mainstreaming of disability across governmental programmes, policies and plans. It had established a ministry for persons with disabilities, as well as an electronic database on persons with disabilities which would be used to generate statistics and inform evidence-based inclusive policies and programmes. The United Republic of Tanzania also had a new disability policy based on the slogan “Nothing about us without us”. His country appreciated the opportunity to reflect on its progress and learn from other Member States; at the same time, it appealed for stronger international cooperation to implement the Convention.

59. **Ms. Abd Karim** (Malaysia) said that in the Persons with Disabilities Act of 2008, her Government had comprehensively addressed the registration, protection, rehabilitation, development and overall well-being of persons with disabilities, which was further bolstered by the establishment of a dedicated national council for persons with disabilities. Malaysia had also introduced a job coaching programme, through which individuals with disabilities were provided with support to join the workforce and employers were given guidance on universal design principles for office spaces, and on how to foster disability-friendly environments and normalize persons with disabilities in the workplace. In addition, 64 individuals had received training and grants through an entrepreneurship programme specifically for persons with disabilities, which had been launched in 2022.

60. Malaysia had a coordinated disaster-response plan which outlined the functions and responsibilities of various governmental agencies and NGOs in disaster management. In addition, and in line with its commitments under the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response, her Government had incorporated tailored provisions on the protection of and assistance for persons with disabilities into its standard operating procedures for disaster management.

61. The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Regional Centre for Special Educational Needs, headquartered in Malaysia, played a pivotal role in enhancing the quality of special education. Through a suite of capacity-building, research, innovation and strategic planning initiatives, the Centre empowered ASEAN special needs educators, students with disabilities and society as a whole.

62. **Mr. Mushayavanhu** (Zimbabwe) said that rapid technological progress should be harnessed to advance assistive technologies for persons with disabilities, especially technologies that could be used in situations of risk or humanitarian emergencies. Moreover, responses to global threats, which often disproportionately affected persons with disabilities, should incorporate technological advances. Technology transfer was important in that regard. In addition, it was crucial to promote the rights of persons with disabilities to decent work and sustainable livelihoods, including their own livelihood projects, in both rural and urban areas.

63. Aware of the importance of promoting and protecting the rights of persons with disabilities, his Government had launched a national disability policy, which was aligned with the national Constitution and the Convention. The policy had sections dedicated to international cooperation, assistive technology, risks and humanitarian emergencies, and employment and self-reliance. The Government had also established a 15 per cent quota for persons with disabilities in public sector jobs and was encouraging the private sector to hire more persons with disabilities and provide them with reasonable workplace accommodations. It remained open to constructive

discussions and cooperation with other States, as well as international and civil society organizations, on disability issues, including as they related to technological innovation and technology transfer.

64. **Mr. Al-Fatlawi** (Iraq) said that his country's accession to the Convention had greatly influenced its adoption of Act No. 38 of 2013, which served to protect the rights of persons with disabilities and the work of the specialized body established for persons with disabilities and special needs. Iraq appreciated the efforts of Member States to achieve the development-related aims of the Convention, despite numerous challenges, including an increase in the number of persons with disabilities because of terrorism; wars started by terrorist organizations, such as Da'esh; and other problems such as forced displacements and mines.

65. The Government of Iraq had adopted significant procedural measures to protect the rights of persons with disabilities, including an amendment to Act No. 38 of 2013 to reflect a new, rights-based approach to issues relating to disability and development. It had used digital solutions to make it easier for persons with disabilities to enjoy their rights and the benefits to which they were entitled. Governmental funds had also been earmarked for assistive technology and prostheses, and for the launch of social and psychological rehabilitation programmes.

66. The Government was focusing efforts on empowering students with disabilities through educational programmes from primary school through to graduate studies. Other areas included measures to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities, combat discrimination against them and prevent their social exclusion.

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

(iii) Promoting the rights of persons with disabilities to decent work and sustainable livelihoods (CRPD/CSP/2024/4)

67. *Mr. Sekeris (Greece), Acting Vice-President, and Mr. Kumwenda (civil society) presided as Co-Chairs.*

68. **Mr. Sekeris** (Greece), Co-Chair, said that the current global normative framework, consisting of international human rights treaties and development instruments, already provided comprehensive guidance on the advancement of the rights of persons with disabilities in terms of decent work and sustainable livelihoods. The Convention, which was legally binding, was a strong standard for its 191 States parties. Under article 27 thereof, States parties were obliged to take certain measures to promote the rights of persons with disabilities relating to work and employment.

69. In the 2030 Agenda, States Members of the United Nations had pledged to leave no one behind and had emphasized the responsibility of States to respect, protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction of any kind. Sustainable Development Goal 8 reflected the commitment of the international community to achieving full and productive employment and decent work, as well as equal pay for work of equal value for all, including persons with disabilities.

70. Although many countries had made notable progress since the adoption of the Convention, overall, progress had been uneven and too slow. Too many persons with disabilities still encountered various forms of discrimination and exclusion, as well as physical, social, economic and cultural barriers that hindered their full enjoyment of their rights. There were huge gaps between the high-level political commitments and the reality on the ground, gaps which were manifested in the lived experience of many persons with disabilities in countries and communities around the world.

71. Protecting the rights of persons with disabilities and empowering them to gain access to decent work and sustainable livelihoods was an imperative from both a

human rights and a sustainable development standpoint. The Summit of the Future was an opportunity for the international community to improve the situation of persons with disabilities, including by working to ensure the realization of their rights to decent work and sustainable livelihoods. Therefore, the current round-table discussion would serve as a forum for reviewing progress, identifying and addressing existing and emerging challenges, and exploring strategies to further promote disability inclusion and the rights to decent work and sustainable livelihoods for all persons with disabilities.

72. **Mr. Samatar** (Acting Special Representative, International Labour Organization (ILO)), panellist, said that ILO data continued to show that much more needed to be done to improve the employment opportunities of persons with disabilities. Approximately 7 in 10 persons with disabilities were outside the labour force, compared to 4 in 10 persons without disabilities. The labour market participation rate of women with disabilities was particularly low. Worldwide, persons with disabilities were overrepresented among the self-employed. In developing countries where the informal economy tended to account for the largest share of the national economy, persons with disabilities were also overrepresented among workers in the informal economy, leading to a lack of social protection. Where wage data were available, they showed a disability wage gap, most of which was not explained by differences in educational achievements or age, but by unequitable treatment of workers with disabilities. Across all regions, young persons with disabilities were twice as likely to be neither in employment, education or training as young persons without disabilities. Article 27 of the Convention, on work and employment, remained far from being a reality for many persons with disabilities. To improve the situation, disability-targeted action was needed, but, more importantly, the rights of persons with disabilities must be comprehensively and effectively mainstreamed in general initiatives such as youth employment promotion and vocational training.

73. On a more positive note, the ILO Global Business and Disability Network had been collaborating with private sector employers to significantly boost the employment of persons with disabilities worldwide. For over a decade, the Network had been developing, identifying and disseminating exemplary corporate practices in disability inclusion, thereby fostering a more inclusive, diverse workforce. At the global level, the Network was made up of 40 leading multinational enterprises from diverse industry sectors, six international non-business entities with disability expertise and the International Disability Alliance. There were also 40 National Business and Disability Networks, based primarily in the global South, which provided employer-led platforms for small and medium-sized enterprises, nationally or regionally operating companies and local branches of multinational enterprises for exchange and support on disability inclusion issues.

74. The ILO Global Business and Disability Network also offered a free, web-based self-assessment tool that helped companies to identify gaps, prioritize corrective action and access human rights-based technical guidance and support on the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

75. At its eleventh global annual conference, to be held in November 2024, the ILO Global Business and Disability Network would launch two knowledge products: one on the importance of including disability issues in companies' environmental, social and governance efforts, and disability-related key performance indicators; and one on disability inclusion in supply chains and ways in which supply chains could contribute to decent work for persons with disabilities.

76. In collaboration with other United Nations entities and the International Disability Alliance, ILO had been contributing to disability-inclusive climate action.

While much of the attention in that area was devoted to the negative impact of climate change on persons with disabilities, ILO was focused on ensuring that persons with disabilities could play an active role in the just transition to a low-carbon economy and have access to the green jobs that the transition was already creating. Another area where ILO was active was the care and support economy. For working-age persons with disabilities who required personal support, having such support, and in the way they required, would make the difference between being able to work or not. The International Labour Conference was currently holding a general debate on the care economy, and the outcome document would define the work of ILO in the coming years.

77. Through its work with businesses, ILO worked to fight the misconception that the only option for persons with disabilities in developing countries was to work in the informal economy. It had recently started a project with the World Trade Organization, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the International Trade Centre aimed at promoting disability inclusion in trade. The first event under the project would take place at the Global Review on Aid for Trade, to be held in Geneva later in June 2024. Together with the United Nations Children's Fund, ILO had also been working on disability-inclusive social protection schemes. In many countries, non-contributory disability benefits were incompatible with work, meaning that persons with disabilities ended up either not working or working in the informal economy. Disability benefits must be made compatible with waged employment, as benefits were needed to defray the extra costs of living with a disability in typically inaccessible and exclusionary environments.

78. Although much progress had been made in terms of mainstreaming the rights of persons with disabilities in the work of the United Nations system, more work was needed to ensure that persons with disabilities were fully included in the most relevant global initiatives. The Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions and the Global Coalition for Social Justice, both of which ILO continued to firmly support, were examples of global initiatives that needed to lead by example when it came to the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

79. **Mr. Tseng** (Digital Accessibility Services, Etch Empathy, Singapore), panellist, said that when he had lost his eyesight 10 years earlier, at the age of 16, a doctor had told him that he had no hope of furthering his studies and that one of the only careers available to him was to become a massage therapist. He had thought that his vision impairment meant that his life was over, that he was destined for failure as a person because of his disability. Fortunately, he was alive at a time when Governments and societies were increasingly addressing inclusion and independent living for persons with disabilities, and Singapore had been working to champion inclusive employment.

80. Singapore had a road map known as the Enabling Masterplan 2030, which was intended to guide progress towards a truly inclusive society. The plan covered areas including accessible infrastructure, health care, recreation and employment. The objective was to increase the employment rate of persons with disabilities to 40 per cent by 2030 and, despite challenges, Singapore was making progress: the employment rate of persons with disabilities aged 15 to 64 had risen from 28.2 per cent in 2019 to 32.7 per cent in 2023. A major factor in that success was government-instituted employment programmes, such as the Open Door programme, launched in 2014. Persons with disabilities could receive free job coaching and matching under the programme, as well as post-placement support for up to a year; and employers seeking to become more inclusive were eligible for substantial training and job-redesign grants, which covered up to 90 per cent of training costs for supervisors and co-workers, enabling them to provide an inclusive and accommodating workplace for employees with disabilities. Measures such as Open Door were intended to reduce

friction and employers' hesitation about hiring persons with disabilities, and they were necessary: in a 2019 survey conducted in Singapore, while 58 per cent of respondents had positive attitudes towards persons with disabilities in the workplace, 42 per cent still had either neutral or negative attitudes.

81. The employability of persons with disabilities was another key issue. His country had a national skills training initiative called SkillsFuture Singapore, under which a growing number of customized courses were available, with subsidies for persons with disabilities. There were also grants for training providers to customize courses to meet the needs of persons with disabilities. Those courses empowered individuals with the skills necessary to be employed or pivot to new career opportunities, particularly in growth sectors such as media and technology. All Singaporeans, including persons with disabilities, received an opening credit of approximately \$370, at age 25, to offset the cost of courses and certifications accredited under the programme. In addition, in 2023, a new initiative called the Enabling Business Hub had been piloted. Hubs were built close to residential areas in order to bring training and employment opportunities closer to home for persons with disabilities, and provided comprehensive employment-related services, including job-matching.

82. Despite his country's progress, however, improvements were needed. More needed to be done to dismantle stereotypes and overcome biases. A 2019 survey of public attitudes towards persons with disabilities in Singapore revealed that older and less educated people tended to think that persons with disabilities could perform only simple jobs, which was simply not true. It was necessary to continuously review and enhance the accessibility of lifelong educational programmes. More needed to be done, also, to increase understanding of how persons with disabilities used assistive technologies at work. Moreover, in addition to tracking job placements and employment rates, it was important to assess the job satisfaction of persons with disabilities and their prospects in terms of career mobility and opportunities to progress.

83. His country's journey towards disability-inclusive employment had shown that many partners had necessary roles to play: Governments, businesses, organizations of persons with disabilities and persons with disabilities themselves. He was currently in the process of establishing his own company and was looking forward to a bright future of inclusive employment over the coming years. States parties to the Convention should take the lead on forging partnerships in order to ensure that the aspirations and abilities of persons with disabilities were recognized.

84. **Mr. Cox** (Down Syndrome Australia), panellist, said there were around 20,000 people in Australia working in segregated employment and approximately 75 per cent of them had intellectual disabilities. Unfortunately, very few people from segregated employment ever transitioned to open employment and they were often paid well below the minimum wage. However, there was strong evidence that persons with intellectual disabilities could work within open employment, which led to better outcomes.

85. Even in open employment, persons with intellectual disabilities were often underemployed and underpaid, and opportunities for them to find good paid work were hard to find. They nevertheless had the right to work on an equal basis with others in open employment and employers needed to see the real value of offering them good jobs in supportive workplaces. The employment sector could be transformed by improving pathways to open employment and by providing the right support and information to employers.

86. Persons with intellectual disabilities wished to see a transition to fair wages with better support systems for employers to hire them. While he had worked for a large

international company with great inclusion policies, the reality was that he had also experienced very little support and the staff had not really understood why he was there.

87. Work experience should be provided to persons with intellectual disabilities to support their transition to open employment, and support for participation in segregated employment should only be considered after all other options had been explored. Segregated employment providers should also be supported to build the capabilities of their workforce to transition to open employment. The Government of Australia was thankfully supporting such efforts. However, more could still be done to improve employment outcomes. In the future, persons with intellectual disabilities should have the same opportunities as everyone else in work and in life.

88. **Ms. Lozano Medina** (Human Rights Watch Colombia), panellist, said that her story was about overcoming social barriers, embracing acceptance, cultivating self-love and relentlessly pursuing opportunities. She was a 27-year-old woman with an intellectual disability, the current holder of the Human Rights Watch Marca Bristo Fellowship and a disability rights advocate. It was important to clarify that disability was not an illness: persons with disabilities were valuable individuals endowed with different abilities, capable of making decisions and contributing positively to their communities. However, they encountered numerous social and attitudinal barriers that limited their day-to-day participation in society. When she was 4, her parents had been told that she could not attend a bilingual school because she would be incapable of speaking one language, let alone two. When she was 11, they had been told that she would not graduate high school. However, she was, in fact, fluent in both Spanish and English, had successfully completed her education, held a job with the support needed to excel and was continually learning how to advocate for disability rights.

89. Societies could adopt exemplary practices to ensure accessible work environments for persons with disabilities. The Government of Iraq, for instance, had enacted legislation mandating employment quotas for persons with disabilities in the public and private sectors. Employment quotas had been recognized by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as a tool for promoting the employment of persons with disabilities. Such quotas should be affirmative actions aimed at integrating historically marginalized groups into the workforce, thereby ensuring that they could exercise their rights. However, effective implementation and follow-up were essential and, unfortunately, those were currently lacking in Iraq. Quotas themselves were often insufficient to dismantle barriers to employment and, if used, should be paired with the enforcement of other non-discrimination and equality legislation to avoid tokenism and segregation in the workplace. Despite challenges, there was room for hope. The Iraqi Alliance of Disability Organizations led workshops to educate employers about the employment rights of persons with disabilities and encourage them to hire accordingly. Following one such workshop, the chief operating officer of a large bakery in Baghdad had employed five deaf workers and, impressed by their performance, had hired others. He now employed nearly 30 deaf individuals and advocated for other businesses to follow suit.

90. Significant barriers remained in many countries, including Iraq and her own country, Colombia. Nevertheless, with suitable programmes, improvements could be made. In Colombia, the Transition to Adult Life Education Programme, led by the NGO Cooperativa Multiactiva Mentas Diferentes (Coopmente) in partnership with the University of Rosario, taught young adults with disabilities essential life skills and rights, fostering a supportive community and a sense of belonging. As a result of such programmes, she had been able to assert her rights, gain a unique educational experience and integrate fully into society. She managed her own finances, lived independently and made her own decisions, in addition to being part of a supportive network. With genuine opportunities, appropriate support and belief in their abilities,

persons with disabilities could surmount obstacles, exceed expectations and make significant contributions to society. As a Marca Bristo fellow, she was preparing to advocate more vigorously for the rights of persons with disabilities. She would seek to raise awareness among Governments, civil society organizations, the private sector and society more broadly. Persons with disabilities needed empowerment, supportive networks and real opportunities for inclusion in order to lead dignified, autonomous lives.

91. She called on all present to contribute actively to the fulfilment of States parties' commitments under the Convention. Specifically, with regard to inclusive education, States must establish high-quality inclusive educational systems, from pre-primary through to higher education, that were adapted to the individual needs of students with disabilities. Higher education opportunities for young persons with disabilities should be expanded, with a view to ensuring that they had access to decent work. In terms of employment, persons with disabilities must be allowed to exercise their fundamental right to work, which, in addition to allowing them to demonstrate their skills and talents and to contribute to society, enabled them to live independent lives. Countries should regularly collect statistics on the number of persons with disabilities and their employment rates, and should establish monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure that the working conditions and wages of employees with disabilities were on a par with those of other employees. Furthermore, countries should require government ministries to periodically report on their performance in meeting any employment quotas for persons with disabilities. Governments should create more possibilities for formal and decent employment with built-in support systems. Persons with disabilities, as fundamental pillars of societies, deserved the opportunity to live full, autonomous lives, be part of society and realize their dreams – and all parties must work together to make that possible.

92. **Ms. Rodríguez** (Observer for the National Disability Council, Dominican Republic) said that her country had an Act on labour inclusion which established percentage quotas for persons with disabilities in the public and private sectors. However, the Dominican Republic was far from achieving those quotas. Part of the problem related to inclusive education, which was deficient, making it very challenging for persons with disabilities to compete in the labour market. Despite progress, major barriers remained – in universities, in particular, but also in primary and secondary education. Work was under way to make universities more accessible, which was making higher education more accessible. But accessibility was not the only factor: the costs of inclusion, such as living costs for persons with disabilities and paying not only enrolment costs, but also hiring an interpreter, if necessary, posed challenges. She wanted to know what her country could do to continue to narrow the gap in training and education.

93. **Mr. Martínez** (Ecuador) said that his country had legally mandated quota of 4 per cent employees with disabilities for every 25 employees. In addition to considering the labour inclusion of persons with disabilities, it was considering the employment of fathers, mothers and legal guardians of persons with disabilities, with due regard for persons with severe disabilities. The Government was working with the Alliance of Ecuador, which provided grants for persons with disabilities, as well as for inclusive employers. After the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, his Government had examined the situation of persons with disabilities and their legal representatives and had been reminded of the importance of ensuring labour stability in times of crisis. His Government regularly conducted labour inspections to ensure compliance with the 4 per cent inclusion quota in companies and had disseminated a manual on good practices in labour inclusion to public and private sector employers.

94. **Ms. Mangar** (Guyana) said that her Government had programmes and policies in place to reduce barriers to the full participation of persons with disabilities in

society. It was continuously improving access to education for persons with disabilities so as to enable them to find employment in both the private and public sectors, including through a part-time work initiative and the national Open Doors programme, which was much like Open Doors in Singapore. Those initiatives enabled persons with disabilities to work alongside their peers, thereby promoting accessibility, inclusion and equality in the workforce.

95. Education, sports, and vocational and skills training led to economic empowerment and entrepreneurship, and were all critical areas of her country's efforts to encourage participation in work life. Guyana had also implemented supportive measures, such as providing cash grants for business development and access to training and equipment, free hearing aids and mobility aids, and low-cost prostheses and other assistive devices. As Guyana continued to make significant investments in the rights of persons with disabilities, including their rights to education and financial independence, it underscored the importance of evidence-based practices. The current session was a valuable opportunity for sharing best practices and further collaborating with a view to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and leaving no one behind.

96. **Ms. Madak** (Türkiye) said that all people, including persons with disabilities, had the right to decent employment and livelihoods. Accordingly, through her country's national action plan on the rights of persons with disabilities, which covered the period 2023–2025, her Government was diversifying and strengthening models of open, inclusive and accessible employment for persons with disabilities; providing reasonable accommodations; supporting self-employment for persons with disabilities; and providing them with financial benefits, including through income support and tax arrangements. A job-coaching programme was being expanded countrywide, and persons with disabilities who wished to start their own businesses were provided with startup capital and management training. Income tax was deducted at variable rates, depending on the severity of disability, in order to offset disability-related expenses. In addition, Türkiye was preparing to offer training to the personnel of public institutions to support the creation of accommodating public-sector workplaces. Multilateral partnerships could facilitate the development of different employment models that would enable persons with disabilities to participate in society as productive, self-sufficient individuals on an equal footing with others.

97. **Mr. Houédakor** (Canada) said that his Government was determined to eliminate the obstacles that persons with disabilities faced in obtaining decent work and sustainable livelihoods, in order to leave no one behind. To that end, Canada had launched key initiatives, including the Canadian Accessibility Act and a feminist international aid policy. At the Generation Equality Forum, it had pledged to provide 100 million Canadian dollars to address problems linked to paid and unpaid care work, including caring for persons with disabilities, in the low- and middle-income countries that it provided with international assistance.

98. His Government was ready to launch its national employment strategy for persons with disabilities, aimed at helping people to unlock good jobs and advance in their careers, as well as supporting employers to create inclusive workplaces. Earlier in 2024, Canada had launched a programme known as Equi'Vision with the aim of assessing wage gaps that were not merely a function of gender and raising awareness of the obstacles faced by those in underrepresented groups, including persons with disabilities, in the world of employment. Canada valued its partnerships with other countries, international organizations such as ILO and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and the member countries of the Group of 7 and the Group of 20. It was keen to hear which measures other States parties had

implemented. Lastly, he asked how Governments could increase the participation of persons with disabilities in discussions with private-sector employers.

99. **Ms. McRae** (Observer for Women Enabled International) said that it was not possible to effectively address the labour market participation of persons with disabilities without an intersectional approach whereby laws, public policies and budgetary allocations were designed to address both disability and gender issues. In addition, international cooperation was needed to support the self-employment of women with disabilities. Around the world, education provided the building blocks for women and gender-diverse individuals with disabilities to access the labour market. However, girls and women with disabilities were less likely than boys and men with disabilities to have access to inclusive education. Worse, they often faced sexual, emotional and physical violence and harassment, which sometimes prevented them from completing their educations, which, in turn, meant they were unable to compete for decent jobs. They continued to be at greater risk of exposure to violations even once they were in employment. Therefore, labour market policies must be designed to prevent gender-based violence. Moreover, women with disabilities in unpaid and low-paid care work required recognition. Women accounted for most of the workers in the unpaid care sector. An intersectional approach to disability and gender issues would mean ensuring that labour laws and disability and gender equality policies were harmonized.

100. **Mr. Lomuashvili** (Georgia) said that he was the Deputy Minister of Justice of his country. Due to his own life experience as a man with disabilities, he was and would continue to be a tireless supporter of persons with disabilities. The Ministry of Justice was one of the leading governmental bodies in his country in terms of the rights of persons with disabilities. The Ministry implemented actions based on the principles enshrined in each article of the Convention. For instance, it annually developed action plans on the basis of extensive discussions with persons with disabilities and their organizations. They also fully participated in the monitoring of outcomes under the plans. His Ministry had also implemented initiatives on the legal status of persons with disabilities, as well as providing training to its employees and those of related agencies on the rights of persons with disabilities and on how to communicate with them. Over the last three years, the number of persons with disabilities employed by the Ministry had doubled: as at 13 June 2024, some 60 persons with disabilities were employed in the Ministry of Justice system. In addition, the infrastructure and electronic programmes of his Ministry and its agencies were adapted for persons with disabilities.

101. **Ms. Shannon** (Australia) said that ensuring that all persons with disabilities had the same opportunities as persons without disabilities to gain and maintain employment was one of the key pillars of her country's 10-year disability strategy. One of the major areas of focus under the strategy was on changing community attitudes. It was clear from the panellists' statements that conscious and unconscious bias was a critical factor in ensuring that there were sufficient employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. Co-workers and employers played an extremely important role in enabling persons with disabilities to make meaningful contributions in the workplace. A significant proportion of employment for persons with disabilities in Australia was currently segregated, and her Government was very motivated to transform that sector. It was also reforming its specialist employment services, which assisted persons with disabilities to prepare for work, placed them in work and helped them to maintain their jobs on an ongoing basis.

102. **Ms. Davoine** (European Union) said that despite an increased focus on equality in employment, only some 50 per cent of persons with disabilities in the European Union were employed. Of that 50 per cent, many worked part time, retired early and worked in low-quality jobs. Therefore, the European Union had prioritized the

employment of persons with disabilities in its Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030 by adopting a disability employment package. To date, as part of the package, the European Union had issued guidelines for employment services, published a catalogue of positive practices on hiring perspective and issued guidance on learning. It was also discussing the setting of employment targets.

103. There were several reasons for the disadvantaged situation of persons with disabilities in the labour market, including a lack of awareness among employers of their legal obligations related to equality and of the national and regional resources and the support available to them. Misconceptions and stigma were another major challenge. She asked the panellists what public actors, including civil society organizations, could do to remedy those challenges.

104. **Ms. Pacheco** (Panama) said that all stakeholders should support the good practices outlined by the panellists, in accordance with article 27 of the Convention. Currently, at the global level, some 80 per cent of working-age persons with disabilities were being left behind. That was partly because, in most countries, jobs for persons with disabilities, especially for women, were characterized by inaccessible working conditions, which, rather than providing dignity, were actually harmful.

105. Panama was promoting entrepreneurship for persons with disabilities through partnerships with private-sector enterprises, trade unions and international development agencies. Its National Institute of Vocational Training and Capacity-Building for Human Development (INADEH) had 23 training centres nationwide, which provided lifelong learning, including for persons with disabilities. Moreover, by law, 2 per cent of positions in businesses must be held by persons with disabilities, and there were regular inspections to monitor compliance. According to the latest census, there were 29,000 economically active persons with disabilities in Panama. The Ministry of Labour and Employment was facilitating the recruitment of persons with disabilities through partnerships with the private sector. Panama also had a programme to enhance the employability of persons with disabilities. It was imperative to overcome the challenges to the employment of persons with disabilities to ensure that no one was left behind.

106. **Mr. De Vera** (Observer for People with Disabilities Australia) said that his organization was the largest organization of persons with disabilities in the southern hemisphere. With support from the Government of Australia, it represented all persons with disabilities in Australia, including LGBTQIA+ persons. Everyone, including LGBTQIA+ persons with disabilities, had the rights to decent work and to a sustainable livelihood. However, the intersectionality between disability, sexuality and gender identity affected those people's ability to fully enjoy those rights, affecting their economic security. Decades of inaction, discrimination and prejudice had resulted in LGBTQIA+ persons not being able to participate fully at work, which in turn had led to a notable absence of inclusive best practices and policies that recognized the needs of those individuals with disabilities in the workplace. Member States and civil society should consider the rights to decent work and a sustainable livelihood through an intersectional lens. Equality and non-discrimination were central pillars of the United Nations, and rights must not be denied on the basis of sexuality, gender or gender identity. With economic security came greater freedom, and everyone, including LGBTQIA+ persons with disabilities, deserved to be free.

107. **Mr. Dunn** (Jamaica) said that his country was building a truly inclusive society. His Government had adopted codes of practice for employment and for education and training in order to promote the rights of persons with disabilities to decent work. Persons with disabilities received a bimonthly cash grant under a flagship social protection programme, which was focused on health and education. The Disabilities

Act 2024 prohibited discrimination and served to protect the rights of persons with disabilities. Jamaica had also established a disability rights tribunal to offer redress to those persons with disabilities who believed that they had been victims of discrimination in the workplace. In addition, it had a national quota whereby persons with disabilities must account for 5 per cent of recruitment pools for public-sector jobs. Jamaica was working to ensure that no one was left behind, which was in line with its motto: “Out of many, one people”.

108. **Ms. Lozano Medina** (Human Rights Watch Colombia) said that women with disabilities faced multiple forms of discrimination: they were discriminated against both for their gender and for having a disability. That made it especially hard for them to find decent and meaningful employment. For that reason, it had been deemed necessary to include a dedicated article on the rights of women with disabilities in the Convention. In addition, the need to establish policies to support women was emphasized in various places in the Convention, including in article 27, on employment.

109. **Mr. Cox** (Down Syndrome Australia) said that discrimination against persons with intellectual disabilities needed to come to an end. Some were being paid as little as \$4 per hour. Employers needed to be serious about employing persons with intellectual disabilities; they must understand how such persons could be beneficial for their businesses. There must be support systems for persons with intellectual disabilities, and systems must be reformed so as to ensure that everyone was paid a proper wage. More disability self-advocates were needed. Persons with intellectual disabilities deserved to be heard, listened to, and treated with respect, love and kindness. By coming together, the international community, including disability advocates, could make that a reality.

110. **Mr. Tseng** (Digital Accessibility Services, Etch Empathy, Singapore), responding to the question raised by the representative of Canada about how to facilitate better dialogue with the private sector, said that there was the scope for creative approaches. A lot of the employment-related work that he had witnessed firsthand in Singapore involved establishing touch-points, taking initial steps with a view to employment for persons with disabilities as the long-term goal. One relevant programme was a mentorship programme championed by the Singaporean disability agency SG Enable. Through its business connections, SG Enable asked senior managers and other high-level staff at some of the largest companies and multinational corporations in the country whether they would like to mentor a young person with disabilities. Surprisingly, the response had been very positive. Although such mentorships might not immediately lead to employment, they fostered conversations between high-level executives and persons with disabilities, showing persons with disabilities that it was possible for them to achieve their goals. Similar programmes could be implemented elsewhere as the start of inclusive employment efforts.

111. In addition to employment, recreation was an important aspect of social participation. Some people might be surprised to learn that people with blindness, like himself, often enjoyed playing video games – although they could not play them in the traditional way. However, gaming and other recreational activities could be valuable learning tools, enabling persons with disabilities to realize what was possible. Assistive technologies could facilitate participation in online spaces, in games and in other activities, such as sports.

112. **Mr. Samatar** (International Labour Organization (ILO)) said that the data and examples shared during the foregoing discussion had underscored the critical need for ongoing and enhanced efforts, both targeted and mainstream, to create truly inclusive labour markets. In that regard, the ILO Violence and Harassment

Convention, 2019 (No. 190) played a vital role in protecting the rights and dignity of workers, including those with disabilities. With regard to the comments on quotas, he wished to highlight that, while quotas for persons with disabilities were an important measure, they were not enough on their own. It was essential to ensure that persons with disabilities not only entered the workforce, but also thrived once in employment, and benefited from equal opportunities for retention and career development.

113. In order to foster dialogue with private-sector entities, in particular with small and medium-sized enterprises, Governments could establish advisory board that included representatives of the private sector, disability advocacy groups and other stakeholders. Regular meetings and collaborative forums could facilitate the exchange of ideas, best practices and challenges, including learning from the ILO Global Business and Disability Network. Involvement of the private sector could encourage its meaningful engagement and commitment to disability inclusion. ILO remained committed to collaborating with its partners to advance progress on inclusive employment initiatives, including through the Second World Summit for Social Development, to be held in 2025.

114. **Mr. Sekeris** (Greece), Co-Chair, said that the discussion had made various points clear. First, persons with disabilities continued to face barriers to entering the workforce, including stigma, discrimination, segregated employment and lack of support. The data shared by the representative of ILO had reflected that bleak reality; the rate of persons outside of the labour force was much higher for persons with disabilities.

115. Second, persons with disabilities were twice as likely as persons without disabilities not to be in employment, education or training – thus, persons with disabilities were being left behind. To compound the “traditional” barriers, artificial intelligence had resulted in new risks that could undermine recruitment, and emerging sectors, such as the digital and green economies, still often excluded persons with disabilities.

116. Third, more needed to be done to improve the employability of persons with disabilities. Violence must be eliminated at all educational levels, and persons with disabilities must have equal access to workplaces. Workplaces must be made accessible, and employers needed to be supported and given training to enable them to build inclusive workplaces.

117. Fourth, persons with disabilities must be provided with the support they needed in order to work, including access to assistive technologies. Wages for persons with disabilities must be on a par with those for persons without disabilities. Social protection should be designed to promote the employment of persons with disabilities, rather than the opposite, and the misconception that persons with disabilities could only work in the informal economy must be dispelled. Data on persons with disabilities and employment should be collected regularly and used to inform policymaking and programming.

118. Lastly, the initiatives under way to address the existing challenges, including job coaching, career service workshops, peer-to-peer exchange and self-assessment tools to identify inclusion gaps in the workplace, were all encouraging.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.