



Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

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Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Thirty-second session

Summary record (partial)* of the 771st meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 12 March 2025, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Kim Mi Yeon

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

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The discussion covered in the summary record began at 11 a.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by Parties to the Convention under article 35

(continued)

Initial report of Palau (CRPD/C/PLW/1; CRPD/C/PLW/Q/1; CRPD/C/PLW/RQ/1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Palau joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of Palau**, introducing his country's initial report (CRPD/C/PLW/1), said that the Government's efforts to advance disability rights were shaped by the voices and lived experience of persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities were advocates and agents of change and a constant reminder that disability inclusion was both a policy goal and a moral imperative. Despite the unique and multiple challenges posed by the country's geography, resource limitations and the growing impact of climate change, the Government was firmly committed to building a more inclusive and resilient society.
3. Milestone legislation had been adopted in September 2024 to ensure a more structured, participatory and sustainable approach to disability policymaking and implementation. The Persons with Disabilities Act (Republic of Palau Public Law 11-36) provided for the establishment of a Coordinating Committee on Persons with Disabilities to develop a comprehensive National Policy on Persons with Disabilities within 270 days to replace the National Disability Inclusive Policy 2015–2020, and an Office of Persons with Disabilities, tasked with ensuring and overseeing the implementation of the new policy. The Act also provided for the allocation of tax revenues from alcohol, cigarettes and tobacco products to sustainably fund disability programmes and services. Disability matters would be framed by a multistakeholder governance structure comprising government agencies, civil society organizations, the private sector and persons with disabilities.
4. In recent years, schools, public buildings and parks had been upgraded for accessibility. The Ngermalk and Airai Access Ramp projects, for example, had improved the accessibility of the sea and leisure facilities. The Palau Severely Disabled Assistance Fund currently provided stipends to 391 individuals, including 186 children and older persons with disabilities. The child-raising subsidy had been introduced to assist parents and legal guardians with the cost of raising a child in Palau. In 2024, subsidies in the amount of US\$ 587,200 had been disbursed in support of 2,936 children. In addition, 133 citizens with special healthcare needs had been assisted through a national meal programme, which also provided persons with disabilities with transportation to health and social service facilities.
5. In order to enhance inclusive education, 22 teachers had been trained in the use of assistive technologies, access to individualized education plans had been expanded to enable tailored learning support, and collaboration between the Ministry of Education, the Palau Community College and the private sector had been strengthened to generate career pathways for students with disabilities.
6. Persons with disabilities continued to face systemic barriers to employment and more would need to be done to enforce legislation that prohibited workplace discrimination and to provide employer incentives, among other things. Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, persons with disabilities, including women, had received training and support to gain access to the job market. Entrepreneurship programmes had been expanded to include disability-specific measures.
7. To take account of the fact that women and girls with disabilities experienced disproportionate levels of gender-based violence, the National Gender Mainstreaming Policy was being revised to integrate a disability perspective. Law enforcement personnel and service providers were being trained accordingly and shelters and psychosocial support services had been expanded. The Family Protection Act did not yet include specific provisions to address the unique vulnerability of women and girls with disabilities to gender-based violence, economic exclusion and social marginalization. In order to facilitate the development of targeted interventions, data were being disaggregated by gender and disability. Although inclusive education and early intervention services had been expanded, shortcomings in early childhood education and specialized support services persisted.

8. Given the country's particular vulnerability to climate change-induced disasters, disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction was crucial. The country's main organization of persons with disabilities, OMEKESANG, in partnership with the Ministry of Health and Human Services, had issued guidelines on disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction to ensure that emergency centres were equipped with ramps, assistive devices and specially trained staff, that early warning systems were adapted for persons with sensory disabilities, and that persons with disabilities were actively involved in disaster preparedness planning.

9. In order to ensure equal access to justice, legal aid services delivered by the Public Defender's Office had been expanded, persons with disabilities were provided with accessible court facilities and reasonable accommodation in legal proceedings, and legislation was being reviewed to remove outdated, stigmatizing terminology.

10. In order to promote the political participation of persons with disabilities, accessible voting procedures had been introduced. Efforts were also being made to enhance representation in government advisory bodies to ensure that persons with disabilities participated in decision-making on matters that affected them.

11. Domestic disability-inclusive policies were closely aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals and guided by the Committee's general comment No. 4 (2016) on the right to inclusive education. Much had been done but gaps persisted when it came to government employment quotas, reasonable accommodation, access to inclusive education, and effective monitoring of policy implementation. Collaboration with all relevant stakeholders, in particular persons with disabilities, would continue with a view to building a future where everyone had equal opportunity to thrive.

Articles 1–9 and 31–33

12. **Ms. Dondovdorj** (Coordinator, Country Task Force) said that the State Party's Disabled Person's Anti-Discrimination Act failed to provide a comprehensive response to the multiple and intersectional discrimination faced by women and migrants with disabilities. More needed to be done to tackle the disproportionate violence against children with disabilities and eliminate disability-related discriminatory attitudes, negative stereotypes and stigma. The current guardianship regime should be replaced with supported decision-making and support for independent living and inclusive education should be stepped up. Structural barriers could only be tackled if persons with disabilities participated in policymaking and implementation, and effective mechanisms were needed to facilitate such engagement.

13. **Ms. Fefoame** (Country Task Force) said that she wished to learn about the steps taken to bring the definition of disability in domestic legislation into line with the Convention and to repeal or amend any conflicting provisions and the timeline for doing so.

14. **A representative of Palau** said that one of the first tasks of the Coordinating Committee on Persons with Disabilities and the Office of Persons with Disabilities would be to conduct a full legislative review with a view to aligning domestic provisions with the Convention and removing any discriminatory language.

15. **Ms. Fefoame** said that she would be interested to know whether there were any plans to remove terminology that emphasized people's impairment, which reflected a medical approach to disability and reinforced stigma. It would also be useful to know how the Government would deal with the lack of a clear timeline for the establishment of the Coordinating Committee and the Office of Persons with Disabilities and how the findings of the legislative review and Convention benchmarks would be implemented.

16. **A representative of Palau** said that the future Coordinating Committee and Office and the Ministry of Health and Human Services were not in a position to expedite legislative processes. However, efforts were already under way to raise awareness around the importance of aligning domestic legislation with the Convention, and the outcome of the current dialogue with the Committee would provide crucial input in that regard. The legislative changes were expected to be finalized within 12 to 24 months of the establishment of the Coordinating Committee and the Office.

17. **Ms. Fefoame** said that she wished to know what steps the Government was taking to ensure the systematic consultation of persons with disabilities, through their representative

organizations, including organizations of women, children and diverse groups, in respect of the design, implementation and monitoring of disability-related laws, policies and programmes.

18. **A representative of Palau** said that organizations of persons with disabilities were represented on the Coordinating Committee on Persons with Disabilities that was working on the development of the National Policy on Persons with Disabilities as well as in various committees and task forces of the Ministry of Health and Human Services and the Ministry and Education.

19. **Ms. Fefoame**, noting that the State Party did not have a law on reasonable accommodation and that existing policies did not offer enforceable protection against discrimination, said that she would be interested to hear what specific steps were being taken to amend article IV of the Constitution and relevant legislation to include disability as a prohibited ground of discrimination and to ensure that the Disabled Person's Anti-Discrimination Act covered all forms of disability-based discrimination and recognized the denial of reasonable accommodation as a form of discrimination.

20. **A representative of Palau** said that, despite the absence of a specific law, reasonable accommodation was provided in practice at the national level. As a consultant working for the Ministry of Health and Human Service who had a disability herself, she could attest to that fact, as she received the support she need to do her job, such as personal assistance. Nonetheless, there was clearly still room for improvement in that area.

21. **Ms. Fefoame** asked what specific steps would be taken to make the necessary improvements.

22. **A representative of Palau** said that reasonable accommodation would be addressed in the National Policy on Persons with Disabilities and in the forthcoming legislative review.

23. **Ms. Fefoame** said that it would be interesting to hear what mechanism would be put in place to monitor and evaluate the effective implementation of anti-discrimination and reasonable accommodation policies. It would also be useful to know whether there were any plans to adopt a strategy for the elimination of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that recognized disability-based discrimination and its intersection with other grounds such as age, sex, race, ethnicity, gender identity or any other status.

24. **A representative of Palau** said that the enactment of the Persons with Disabilities Act and the establishment of the Coordinating Committee and Office of Persons with Disabilities had marked a significant and long-overdue milestone in the country's handling of disability affairs. The Committee and Office were tasked with overseeing implementation of the Convention in Palau and would assist, for example, the Ministry of Health and Human Services with mainstreaming data collection in order to identify specific needs and would work with the Ministry of Justice to provide a better understanding of the specific discrimination, threats and violence faced by persons with disabilities, including women, girls and children. It was important for the Coordinating Committee and the Office to be allocated the necessary resources to be able to carry out their mandates and for the Government to show strong political will in implementing their recommendations.

25. **Ms. Fefoame**, noting that the Family Protection Act mentioned disability only briefly and lacked actionable steps for implementation, leaving women and girls with disabilities without sufficient legal protection and support, said that she wished to know how the State Party planned to strengthen gender mainstreaming to ensure that women and girls with disabilities were included in all relevant policies and programmes and to include a gender perspective in disability-related legislation and policies.

26. **A representative of Palau** said that weaknesses in the implementation of the Family Protection Act included inadequate communication between the relevant agencies and a lack of training for healthcare and law enforcement personnel and emergency responders on the provisions of the Act. A review of the Act itself and of the implementation process would be undertaken over the next 6 to 12 months in order to identify the necessary textual amendments and steps to enhance implementation, including the allocation of the necessary human, fiscal and other resources.

27. **Ms. Fefoame** asked what steps were taken to ensure that the voices of women and girls with disabilities were heard and what resources were available to ensure their full participation.

28. **A representative of Palau** said that, in view of the limited human resources available, a number of prominent civil society organizations served almost as an extension of the Government when it came to the implementation of policies and programmes. With regard to women's affairs, the Gender Office in the Ministry of State coordinated with the Disability Office in the Ministry of Health and Human Services and with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Justice. There was nothing to prevent women and girls with disabilities from participating in the development of the National Policy on Persons with Disabilities. In fact, many of the advisory committees of the Ministry of Health and Human Services were required to include representatives of women and parents and guardians of children with special needs among their members.

29. **Ms. Fefoame** said that she would welcome information on how the participation of children in decisions on matters that affected them was monitored.

30. **A representative of Palau** said that, other than the data collected by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and Human Services and some civil society organizations, data on children with disabilities were generally lacking. Following the ministerial restructuring, as part of which disability, ageing and family protection were now housed within the Ministry of Health and Human Services, work was under way to streamline data collection methods, tools and repositories so as to ensure more comprehensive data sets that could inform policies on persons with disabilities, including women and children. Data were collected through an annual survey for children and young people with special healthcare needs, which identified physical, mental and psychosocial issues that needed to be addressed through an integrated approach. In addition, there were plans to expand the annual school health screening programme to include children aged between 3 and 5 years old.

31. **Ms. Fefoame** said that she would be interested to know what steps the State Party was taking to put an end to the persistent discrimination, negative stereotypes and prejudice against persons with disabilities, which could lead to their incarceration, particularly in rural communities. She would also like to know whether there were any plans to develop a long-term awareness-raising strategy on the rights of persons with disabilities, including on the use of appropriate disability-related terms, with the meaningful involvement of persons with disabilities and the necessary funding.

32. **A representative of Palau** said that efforts were under way, with the involvement of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations, to raise awareness and train relevant stakeholders on disability and the inclusion of persons with disabilities. As noted in the State Party report, many ad hoc awareness-raising activities had been conducted, but a long-term strategy had yet to be adopted.

33. **Ms. Fefoame** said that, while welcome improvements had been made in the area of accessibility, many gaps remained in ensuring equal access to the physical environment and essential services like information, communications and transportation. She would therefore be interested to hear what measures the Government was taking to identify existing barriers to access in the public and private sectors and to provide the human, financial and technical resources necessary to remove those barriers. It would also be helpful to know what was being done to bridge the digital divide, particularly in terms of improving access to affordable Internet services, assistive technology and digital literacy programmes for persons with disabilities. She would especially like to know how persons with disabilities and their representative organizations, including women and children and persons who used intensive human communication and sign language, were involved in those efforts.

34. **A representative of Palau** said that, unfortunately, the general attitude among the majority of the population of Palau, unless they knew or were related to a person with a disability, was simply to ignore the issue of disability. There was therefore a need for a real change in culture and attitude towards disability. Another issue related to accessibility was that Palau did not yet have a building code, which made it difficult to conduct accessibility audits. It was hoped that the new National Policy on Persons with Disabilities would result

in the adoption of specific accessibility strategies as well as a building code that prioritized universal accessibility.

35. **Ms. Fefoame** said that, while the inclusion of the Washington Group short set of questions on functioning in the census was a welcome development, she wished to know whether the information thus collected was used to inform the development of policies and programmes and whether data disaggregated by age, ethnicity and other variables were being collected.

36. **A representative of Palau** said that there were many gaps in data collection at all levels with regard to persons with disabilities. The data sets currently being collected were specific only to particular sectors. It was therefore necessary to increase, coordinate and consolidate data collection and to produce more comprehensive reports on issues and indicators relevant to the implementation of the Convention. The new Coordinating Committee on Persons with Disabilities would have an important role to play in that regard. As part of the preparation of the national development plan, the national census was being reviewed to identify gaps, including with respect to indicators specific to persons with disabilities.

37. **Ms. Fefoame** said that she would like to know more about the new Coordinating Committee, including its membership and budget and the extent of its responsibilities, which seemed very broad.

38. **A representative of Palau** said that, significantly, the Coordinating Committee was the first such body to be established under specific legislation rather than on an ad hoc basis. According to the law, the members of the Committee included the Minister of Health and Human Services, the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Education, the Minister of Finance, the Social Security Administrator, a representative from an organization that advocated for or provided services to persons with disabilities and a representative from an organization that represented the parents of persons with disabilities, both appointed by the President of the Republic, a representative of a religious or faith-based organization, and a representative of the Governors Association. The Committee had a mandate to report on the progress of work relating to the Convention directly to the President and to the Congress. Given the established legal mandate, the Government could now be held accountable to ensure that specific resources were allocated directly to the Committee. Of course, the Coordinating Committee would not be operating alone, but would be collaborating with existing partners and civil society organizations to strengthen the work already being done.

39. **Ms. Fefoame** asked which representative organizations of persons with disabilities were involved in the Coordinating Committee on Persons with Disabilities and how their effective participation was ensured.

40. **A representative of Palau** said that, currently, only one organization of persons with disabilities and one umbrella civil society organization were represented on the Coordinating Committee. Note had been taken of the recommendation to ensure the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities, civil society and the private sector in that body.

41. **Ms. Fefoame** asked what steps were being taken to ensure the meaningful consultation of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in relation to international cooperation initiatives in the context of the Jakarta Declaration on the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities 2023–2032 and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

42. **A representative of Palau** said that persons with disabilities or their representative organizations had been represented in various committees and bodies, for instance as part of the voluntary national review under the 2030 Agenda in 2024.

43. **Ms. Fefoame** said that she would welcome further details on how disabilities were placed at the heart of discussions relating to the 2030 Agenda. She would also welcome a progress report on the designation of a national human rights institution in line with the Paris Principles, including to monitor the implementation of the Convention with the full participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations.

44. **A representative of Palau** said that the primary barrier to the establishment of a national human rights institution was funding constraints and that the current solution was to assign the relevant tasks to existing bodies, even if they were not entirely independent from government. He wished to stress that Palau understood the value and purpose of such an institution and might review its position if it received external assistance.

45. **Ms. Fefoame** asked what steps had been taken to designate and assign a budget to an independent mechanism to monitor the implementation of the Convention.

46. **A representative of Palau** said that that would be the responsibility of the new Coordinating Committee, which was an exciting development, as it would put an end to the fragmentation of efforts in that domain.

The meeting was suspended at 12.25 p.m. and resumed at 12.30 p.m.

47. **Mr. Makni** said that, while he commended the State Party for its clear commitment to creating an inclusive society, as illustrated by its efforts in the area of accessibility, he wished to stress how essential access to public transport was to such a society. He wondered whether the State Party envisaged measures for ensuring the accessibility of information for persons with various types of disabilities.

48. **Ms. Gamio Ríos** said that she would be interested to know how many of the women and girl participants in the training provided by Palau Entrepreneurs for Growth in 2024 had disabilities and whether there had been any follow-up with participants after the training. She welcomed the fact that the State Party was studying the barriers faced by women with disabilities who were victims of violence and wished to ascertain whether it was generating statistics to determine any link between lack of access to education and employment and those barriers.

49. **Ms. Boresli** asked what measures were being taken to facilitate freedom of movement and access to information and communications technologies for persons with disabilities and to support communities and organizations representing persons with disabilities, particularly children, in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

50. **Mr. Corporán Lorenzo** said that he wished to stress the importance of including a focus on accessibility in planning and that the State Party might take advantage of technical cooperation to realize universal accessibility.

51. **A representative of Palau** said that, unfortunately, public transportation in general was underdeveloped in Palau, being largely limited to Koror, and there were no accessible buses. Public transportation was not currently part of the culture, and the transportation of persons with disabilities fell to their families. Transportation services with the sole accessible van were available on request only, but the Division of Human Services was planning to purchase additional vehicles. As Palau looked to expand the system, it would make sure to invest in disability-friendly and accessible equipment.

52. Up to 90 per cent of the population had access to a reasonably priced Internet connection. However, the authorities had yet to identify the specific technologies or devices that persons with disabilities might need to fully benefit from information and communications technologies. Persons with visual impairments, for example, had to source devices from abroad. If data showed there was a need, recommendations could be made to local and national telecommunications operators to make special devices available.

53. Civil society organizations often had a disability component in their missions, and the Ministry of Human Resources, Culture, Tourism and Development had a plan in place to further involve different populations, including persons with disabilities, in discussions on how to enhance their participation in the formal economy and the labour market.

54. The Government would bear in mind during the revision of the Family Protection Act the Committee's point that data on violence against women and girls should be disaggregated by disability.

55. **Ms. Placencia Porrero** said that it would be interesting to know whether the State Party included accessibility requirements in its procurement processes for public transportation, rather than investing in separate transportation for persons with disabilities,

and whether accessibility standards and requirements were taken into account in the design of government websites and online services.

56. **Ms. Gabriilli** said that she would welcome the delegation's comments on the openness of politicians to discussing disability issues and their willingness to amend and adopt legislation to incorporate the principles of the Convention and on the support the international community could provide to encourage those changes to be made sooner rather than later.

57. **A representative of Palau** said that, due to budget considerations, the approach to the accessibility of public transportation – namely, whether it made more sense to continue providing on-request transportation services in dedicated vehicles or to make the entire fleet disability-friendly – was chiefly one of cost and benefit, and any changes made to the system would have to be gradual. Given the size and resources of the country, the Government tended to be more reactive than proactive. If data showed a problem, for instance with the access of persons with disabilities to the Internet or to a specific building, then remedial action was taken. However, due note had been taken of the Committee's points about accessibility, including of information, and the need to think holistically. There was political will to support persons with disabilities; the difficulty lay in prioritizing the issue in budget talks. Targeted campaigns were needed to raise awareness among law- and policymakers so that they understood that persons with disabilities should not be regarded simply as an add-on to mainstream health and social services and that it was necessary to appropriately fund the Coordinating Committee on Persons with Disabilities.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.