



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 of the 775th meeting*

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 14 March 2025, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Kim Mi Yeon

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* No summary record was issued for the 774th meeting.

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

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

(continued)

Initial report of Palau (continued) (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.*

Articles 21–30

2. **Mr. Nwanoro** (Country Task Force) said that he wished to hear more about the nature of the barriers that persons with disabilities faced in gaining access to information and enjoying freedom of speech and about the legislative and other measures, such as the promotion of sign language and the provision of accessible Internet and information in sign language and Braille, the Government was taking to overcome those barriers. He also wished to hear about efforts to create an enabling environment, through the provision of assistive technologies and other aids, to guarantee that persons with disabilities, especially women and girls, had access to inclusive education.

3. **A representative of Palau** said that persons with disabilities enjoyed freedom of expression and were given opportunities to express themselves, for instance at events to mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, but the availability of sign language and audiovisual equipment, including in schools, was one of the country's biggest weaknesses. The Government's plan was to give teachers and schools the tools necessary to provide appropriate education, then to expand those efforts to include the media and the healthcare and social sectors. The Ministry of Education, which was fortunate to receive some funding from the United States of America, had adopted a plan to integrate students with disabilities and special needs into mainstream classrooms. He knew of two cases of children with disabilities who had received support throughout their education in mainstream schools, so a basic model was in place for achieving inclusion and it was now a matter of scaling it up to the entire education system.

4. **Mr. Nwanoro** asked how accessible healthcare facilities were for persons with disabilities, in particular wheelchair users, blind persons and hard-of-hearing persons, what training was provided to healthcare practitioners in interacting with persons with disabilities, what services were in place to help patients with disabilities navigate healthcare facilities and whether information on sexual and reproductive health was accessible for persons with disabilities, in particular women and girls.

5. **A representative of Palau** said that there was currently no particular disability training for doctors and nurses, although a psychiatrist cared for patients with mental conditions. Clinics and hospitals were designed to be accessible, including through the provision of a counsellor to guide patients with disabilities through their visit; the main challenge was sign language. Women and children with disabilities enjoyed the same access to information as anyone else. The Government was aware, however, that more needed to be done in the healthcare sector regarding disability issues.

6. **Mr. Nwanoro** said that he wished to know what percentage of persons with disabilities were employed, whether there was a quota for the employment of persons with disabilities, how the Government ensured equal opportunities, in particular for persons with disabilities who had an education, and how it fostered accessible and enabling work environments, including through the provision of training to employers.

7. **A representative of Palau** said that, while there was legislation requiring employers to ensure workplace accessibility when they recruited persons with disabilities, it currently applied only to the public sector. The Government currently employed some 30 individuals with disabilities, including a member of the delegation present for the dialogue with the Committee. Although that was a high number considering the size of the country's population, more could be done to ensure that public agencies were aware of the law and did not disregard the candidacies of persons with disabilities. More should also be done to

address the other main cause of unemployment among persons with disability, namely, the perceptions of individuals' own families as to their ability to work.

8. **Mr. Nwanoro** said that he was interested in learning about the participation of persons with disabilities in politics and public life, specifically, whether persons with intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities had the right to vote, what accessibility measures were in place at polling stations, how many individuals with disabilities were involved in politics and whether there was a quota for persons with disabilities in political parties and elected office.

9. **A representative of Palau** said that polling stations were generally accessible but the process of casting a ballot was not. For example, a blind person had to be accompanied into the polling booth by an election official, which meant that the ballot was not secret. Discussions were under way with the Election Commission to allow blind voters to be accompanied by a person of their choosing. Removing the constitutional ban on the right to vote of persons with mental disorders would be a harder task because it would involve a referendum, as well as discussions with the healthcare sector. The ban was outdated, however, and the delegation would work with lawmakers upon return to Palau to try to get it lifted.

10. There were no legal measures barring persons with disabilities from running for office, but individuals had to have the confidence and family support to submit their candidacy. The chief eligibility criterion was whether a person was a citizen of Palau. He was aware of one person with a disability having been elected to public office. There was no quota, as such a measure would be unrealistic given the small population and the even smaller percentage of persons with disabilities. Palau did not have political parties at either the national or state levels; all candidates ran as independents.

11. **Mr. Nwanoro** said that he wished to hear about the measures being taken to ensure that persons with disabilities had opportunities to participate in cultural life and recreational activities in equal conditions as others and were not hidden away at home. Had Palau sent athletes to the Paralympic Games?

12. **A representative of Palau** said that a few persons with intellectual disabilities had represented Palau at the Special Olympics, and discussions were under way to send athletes to the Paralympic Games. Disabilities had been taken into account in the planning of the next Pacific Mini Games, which Palau would be hosting that year. The Palau National Olympic Committee had consulted with persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in developing its strategy on inclusive sports. Where children with disabilities could not join in school physical education programmes, efforts were made to involve them in the activities in a different capacity, for instance as scorekeepers. Cultural events and activities were open to all.

13. **A representative of Palau** said that some families believed that disability was a source of shame and therefore did not permit their relatives with disabilities to take part in sports and cultural activities. Consequently, alongside policymaking, efforts in the area of inclusion also had to involve awareness-raising to help families overcome their misgivings.

14. **Ms. Fefoame** (Country Task Force) asked what measures were in place to guarantee the confidentiality of medical records, in particular of persons with psychosocial and/or intellectual disabilities, and whether the State Party intended to strengthen laws on data protection.

15. **A representative of Palau** said that policies were in place to ensure that everyone's private medical information, including assessments conducted in schools and communities, was collected, stored and shared securely. In addition, the legislative gap in that domain should be filled with the enactment within one to two years of the bill on medical privacy. Since the Ministry of Health and Human Services had been the victim of cyberattacks, work on protecting patient records had taken on a technical component as well to ensure that electronic record systems were protected.

16. **Ms. Fefoame** said that she wished to know whether the State Party had taken any specific measures to raise awareness about the rights of persons with disabilities to marry and found a family. She also wondered what support services were in place to guarantee equal rights to home and family life for families of parents and children with disabilities and how

those rights were protected for persons with intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities who were deprived of their legal capacity under the Family Protection Act.

17. **A representative of Palau** said that caring and inclusion were deeply rooted in the culture of Palau and persons with disabilities were not barred from family life, marriage or parenthood. The extent to which they enjoyed family life depended on individual circumstances. Persons with disabilities had equal access to family planning services. Those who married and had or raised children could draw on government support, if necessary, but the country's strong tradition of family and community support remained intact and also extended to persons with disabilities. Currently, there was no apparent need to legislate.

18. **Ms. Dondovdorj** (Country Task Force) said that she wished to find out whether the State Party planned to analyse existing rehabilitation services to ensure that they addressed all aspects of rehabilitation and were based on individual need. Rehabilitation services and programmes must be comprehensive and include the areas of health, employment, education and social rehabilitation. She wondered whether the State Party might contemplate developing a comprehensive strategy and policy on assistive technology to support maximum independence of persons with disabilities more broadly, not only in regard to mobility.

19. **A representative of Palau** said that, during a recent meeting with a representative of the World Health Organization (WHO) in Geneva, options for strengthening rehabilitation services, including through the development of a relevant strategy, had been discussed. An analysis of the situation of persons with disabilities would be brought under way shortly.

20. The issue of assistive technology was addressed in cooperation with regional partners. Current efforts revolved around identifying products on the WHO Priority assistive products list suitable for the Pacific region and devising a procurement policy and legislation on that basis.

21. **A representative of Palau** said that the medical approach to disability continued to prevail in some areas and rehabilitation was often perceived as a medical intervention. Efforts were therefore being made to raise awareness of the human rights model. Rehabilitation services were progressively being moved out of hospitals and into the communities, with providers reaching out to beneficiaries, including those who did not have a medical diagnosis, and providing training to caregivers and relatives. As awareness progressed, setting up the necessary infrastructure for community-based services delivery remained a challenge.

22. **Ms. Fefoame** said that, while cultural values were certainly an asset, social protection remained the responsibility of the State even where family support was available. She wished to know which social protection mechanisms were in place to help persons with disabilities meet their specific needs, and whether older persons with disabilities enjoyed social protection based on both their age and their disability. Given that the income of persons with disabilities was reportedly below average, she wondered how the State Party guaranteed an adequate standard of living, coverage of disability-related expenses, and assistance to those requiring more intensive support. Were there any plans to increase the amount of disability benefits and, if so, a timeline for doing so?

23. **A representative of Palau** said that social protection schemes included the Palau Severely Disabled Assistance Fund, which had recently increased the level of its disbursements. A new child-raising subsidy for children under 18 years of age had also been introduced. In the course of the upcoming legislative review, the Palau Severely Disabled Assistance Fund would be amended to close the current gap in coverage for deaf persons. There was also a special fund to assist individuals and families working in the informal sector. Increases in social security benefits were highly contentious and only possible in small increments. Persons requiring support beyond what was delivered through social security schemes were assisted on a case-by-case basis. Specific requests addressed to the Division of Human Services were met either directly or referred to another agency or non-governmental organization able to deliver more specific support. A minimum wage increase planned for October 2025 would also benefit persons with disabilities who were in employment.

The meeting was suspended at 11 a.m. and resumed at 11.10 a.m.

24. **Mr. Morris** said that he wished to know how many persons with disabilities were enrolled in tertiary education and what reasonable accommodation was available to them. He wondered to what extent sheltered workshops were used to stimulate the employment of persons with disabilities and whether there were any plans to discontinue the use of such workshops.

25. It would be useful to know whether the State Party planned to introduce a quota system to ensure equal representation of persons with disabilities in public sector employment and whether any proactive measures were being taken to promote the political participation of persons with disabilities.

26. **Ms. Gabrilli** said that she wished to learn more about the measures taken to ensure equal access to education and, in particular, their implementation in practice. She would also be interested to know whether there were any incentives for persons with disabilities to run for public office.

27. **Mr. Kouassi** said that he wished to know which locations were typically used as polling stations and whether polling stations in rural areas were also accessible.

28. He was curious to find out whether employees with disabilities were guaranteed the same wages as employees without disabilities and whether the reported fear of persons with disabilities to seek employment because they would lose disability benefits was justified.

29. He struggled to reconcile the delegation's assertion that persons with disabilities enjoyed full family rights and that there was no discrimination against them with its acknowledgement that shame associated with disability persisted. He would be grateful if the delegation could clarify that apparent contradiction.

30. Given the many shortcomings in the implementation of the Convention in the State Party, he wondered whether the instrument was properly understood. Could the delegation perhaps explain why that might be the case?

31. **Ms. Boresli** said that she would welcome information about awareness campaigns conducted to promote the principles of the Convention and eliminate persistent discriminatory practices and cultural beliefs. She wished to know how the State Party ensured that persons with disabilities had access to sports, culture and leisure facilities as a crucial component of inclusion. Could the delegation indicate what percentage of the total budget allocated for sports went to sports activities organized for and by persons with disabilities?

32. **Mr. Corporán Lorenzo** said that he wondered whether the State Party had any experience in using accessible tourism to support the economic well-being, inclusion and independence of persons with disabilities and overall accessibility, and whether it received any technical cooperation in that regard. He was curious to find out whether there were any plans to establish arts and crafts centres to showcase products made by persons with disabilities and their families; involving them in the promotion of the country's rich natural and cultural heritage could be a powerful tool for inclusion.

33. **A representative of Palau** said that, although the number of persons with disabilities enrolled in the country's only community college, which offered two-year associate degree courses, was unfortunately relatively low, several persons with disabilities had successfully graduated from the college. There was nothing barring persons with disabilities from attending the college; although it was not entirely accessible, reasonable accommodation was provided on a case-by-case basis to meet the specific needs of students with disabilities.

34. There were no sheltered workshops in Palau and no businesses employing only persons with disabilities. The employment of persons with disabilities was encouraged in all workplaces in both the public and private sectors.

35. The value of the participation of persons with disabilities in political life was recognized, and they were encouraged to run for election. However, given the very small size of the population, it was not considered judicious to set a quota for the political involvement of persons with disabilities that would be difficult to meet in practice. When it came to

accessibility for voters with disabilities, the polling stations in the main towns were accessible, but the situation was more difficult in rural areas.

36. Nonetheless, efforts were made to ensure that persons with disabilities living in those areas could exercise their right to vote; assistance included transportation and the provision of assistive devices. The Division of Human Services worked in collaboration with the Palau Election Commission to arrange the provision of accommodations for persons with disabilities, while ensuring that they could vote independently and privately.

37. With regard to education, primary and secondary education was mandatory by law for all children, including children with disabilities and migrant children.

38. In the area of employment, the minimum wage law applied to all workers in the public and private sectors. Persons with disabilities thus received the same wages and tax benefits as all other workers in the same salary band. They might also qualify for some of the many social protection programmes to which workers without disabilities did not have access.

39. Overall, the culture of Palau was very accepting, but, of course, the individual experiences of persons with disabilities and persons with mental health conditions when it came to stigma and discrimination varied.

40. With respect to the State Party's understanding of the Convention, it was true that the interactive dialogue with the Committee was proving to be a very good learning exercise for the delegation and had allowed him and the other members to gain better insight into the State Party's obligations under the Convention from the Committee's perspective.

41. Civil society organizations, some of which had participated in the review before the Committee, provided significant support to the Government in conducting ongoing awareness-raising activities on the importance of ensuring the participation of persons with disabilities in all aspects of social and cultural life and guaranteeing the accessibility of events and activities. Of course, there was room for improvement in that area.

42. Although there was no specific budget allocated for disability sports in general, funding was provided for programmes run by the Ministry of Education and the Palau National Olympic Committee. The Government would look into the matter to ensure that the necessary funding was allocated to support sporting activities for persons with disabilities.

43. While Palau was considered a good tourist destination, the cost of travel to the country meant that overall tourist numbers remained relatively low and there were few visitors with disabilities. The promotion of accessible tourism as a tool for economic growth could certainly be considered as part of the country's tourism development plans, but the Government's position was that it was important to first ensure that citizens and residents with disabilities had the necessary services, benefits and access before thinking about accommodating tourists.

44. The Division of Human Services ran a centre that offered handicraft workshops for persons with disabilities and older persons on local handicrafts, and the items produced were sold at a gift shop. Perhaps special exhibitions could also be organized at the national museum to display the artwork and handicrafts created by persons with disabilities and highlight their talents.

45. **Ms. Fefoame** said that she would welcome clarification as to whether persons with disabilities who were in employment also received a disability allowance or whether they lost that entitlement once they started work.

46. She wished to know what steps were being taken towards ratification of the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired or Otherwise Print Disabled.

47. She would appreciate additional information on the responsibilities of the new Coordinating Committee on Persons with Disabilities and its relationship with the existing ad hoc committee on persons with disabilities and any other relevant committees and how the Government intended to ensure the diverse representation of persons with disabilities.

48. The State Party had reported that only 3 to 4 per cent of the population of Palau had a disability. Given that the international average cited by the United Nations was 10 per cent,

she had doubts as to the accuracy of that figure. She would be interested to know what measures the Government intended to take to address that situation.

49. **Ms. Dondovdorj** said that a number of the laws and policies regulating the education of children with disabilities in Palau were not consistent with the Convention; some contained derogatory or outdated terminology, such as “handicapped children”, and did not recognize the principle of reasonable accommodation. She therefore wished to know how the State Party intended to bring those policies and laws into line with the Convention.

50. The Disabled Persons Anti-Discrimination Act provided for equal opportunities for persons with disabilities in employment but did not provide for the comprehensive support required for persons with disabilities to be able to have access to employment opportunities. She would therefore be interested to learn what measures were being taken to align the policy framework for employment with the Convention.

51. Lastly, she wondered whether there were any plans to amend the Constitution to ensure that persons declared mentally incompetent by a court could not be deprived of their right to vote and to take measures to ensure the full accessibility of elections, including of information and communications.

52. **A representative of Palau** said that disability benefits under the Palau Severely Disabled Fund were currently paid only to persons with disabilities who were not in employment. Persons with disabilities who were working were entitled to tax benefits and children’s subsidies.

53. The goal in establishing the new Coordinating Committee was to pursue the work and progress achieved thus far by the ad hoc committees but now with the dedicated budget and mandate provided for by law. With regard to representation on the Coordinating Committee, it might seem unusual to have only two main organizations representing persons with disabilities, but it made sense given the very small size of the country’s population. The Government did not wish to overreach and dictate who should represent persons with disabilities; that was a matter for civil society to decide. In any case, persons with disabilities were fully involved in all matters that affected their lives.

54. It was true that the figure of 3 per cent for the proportion of the population that had a disability was only an estimate and was likely higher, since there was currently a marked increase in the number of cases of autism being diagnosed and there were certainly people with undiagnosed or unrecognized disabilities that were not registered with the Ministry of Health and Human Services. The Government would endeavour to improve its data collection efforts to capture more reliable data.

55. The laws on the education of children with disabilities would be included in the forthcoming legislative review. However, before enacting any new laws, the Government would need to ensure that it had the resources and expertise to implement them.

56. The Government of Palau firmly believed that inclusion was not merely a policy goal but a fundamental human right. That belief would be reflected in forthcoming legislative reforms, accessibility improvements, enhanced data collection and strengthened social services. The enactment of the Persons with Disabilities Act and the development of the National Policy on Persons with Disabilities marked significant milestones in the country’s journey towards full alignment with the Convention. However, true progress required not just policies but actions, enforcement and continuous collaboration. The dialogue with the Committee had reinforced the importance of addressing the gaps and inconsistencies in national legislation and data collection efforts. Upon its return to Palau, the delegation would take immediate action on the priority areas highlighted during the dialogue, working closely with the newly established Coordinating Committee. Efforts would continue in the areas of awareness-raising, capacity-building and training across government agencies, civil society organizations, the private sector and among persons with disabilities themselves. Palau remained steadfast in ensuring that no one was left behind, whether in disaster preparedness, access to education and healthcare or economic and social participation. The insights gained from the dialogue would serve as invaluable guidance as the Government refined and strengthened national frameworks.

57. **Ms. Fefoame** said that the State Party was to be commended on its determination to work towards the implementation of the Convention. However, the Government needed to accelerate those efforts by repealing or amending various legislative provisions that were not in line with the Convention. The Committee looked forward to the Coordinating Committee on Persons with Disabilities beginning work without delay. It also urged the State Party to establish a national human rights institution in line with the Paris Principles.

58. **The Chair** said that the Committee was grateful to the delegation for the constructive dialogue, which had provided further insight into the situation of persons with disabilities in Palau. It commended the State Party for its efforts and encouraged it to take all necessary measures to address the Committee's recommendations.

The meeting rose at noon.