

Statement of

Cecilia Jimenez-Damary, UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

7 March 2022, CRPD Committee
Geneva, Switzerland

Thank you very much for providing us the opportunity to contribute to your deliberations.

In the view of the mandate of the human rights of internally displaced persons, the rights of persons with disabilities constitute an important issue in the context of internal displacement. This is particularly with respect to challenges people living in forced internal displacement face in terms of the equal enjoyment of their rights. Extrapolated figures from the WHO estimate around 6.8 million persons with disabilities living in situations of internal displacement caused by armed conflict and violence. Millions more are displaced by disasters and the adverse effects of climate change every year.

My report to the UN Human Rights Council in 2020 was therefore focused on “Persons with disabilities in the internal displacement” (A/HRC/44/41)¹ to which I invite your attention. The report examines the specific experiences of persons with disabilities in the context of displacement and recommends actions to ensure inclusive protection, assistance and durable solutions. The report aims to develop a better understanding of the diverse experiences of displaced persons with disabilities, which is required to effectively protect and promote their rights, empower them to become active stakeholders in the decision processes that affect them, provide them with inclusive and accessible humanitarian assistance and services; and better support the achievement of their durable solutions.

Persons with disabilities may face discrimination before and during displacement and in the search for durable solutions. Internally displaced persons with disabilities encounter physical, environmental and societal barriers to accessing specific displacement-related information, humanitarian assistance and services, including education, employment, health care and social protection, and barriers more generally to the full enjoyment of their human rights, including the right to participate in society on an equal basis with others and without discrimination. Internally displaced persons with disabilities often face multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination based on other grounds, such as gender, age, ethnicity, religion, group affiliation and displacement itself.

The report recounts how the challenges experienced by persons with disabilities in internal displacement situations may be overlooked by aid and development providers. Compounding marginalisation, persons with disabilities continue to be considered primarily as merely recipients of aid, and their potential to make contributions are unexplored.

¹ <https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/44/41>

As Special Rapporteur, I have therefore called on States and other humanitarian and development actors to shift from awareness of disability to a pro-active human rights-based disability inclusion strategy to manage internal displacement. Internally displaced persons with disabilities have the right to the full gamut of human rights guaranteed under law.

Among the primary recommendations of my report is to ensure that persons with disabilities who are also internally displaced participate in decision making for any policies or projects affecting them. Persons with disabilities, wherever they are, should actually be part of solutions and not be seen as problems. The best way to do this is to enable them to participate in the management of their lives, including in displacement situations.

Another important consideration is that internally displaced persons with disabilities should not be left behind in any policy on protection, assistance and inclusion enabled by the State, the UN agencies and others. The best way to include IDPs with disabilities is to ensure that they are visible and that there are very specific programmes that will be implemented with them or organisations that serve them

The COVID-19 pandemic has created an extra layer of challenge and hardship for IDP populations in general, and more so for those with disabilities. The majority of policies implemented during the pandemic that do address IDPs have no provision for those with disabilities. However, with a chance to build back better, particularly with emergency measures being relaxed in many countries, there is no better time than the present to consult with IDPs with disabilities on how to help in the reintegration process. We must ensure that IDPs with disabilities are actually consulted on how the relaxation of public health measures and the building back better policies are decided upon and implemented. The programming must include participation of IDPs with disabilities. This is the only way that their rights can be guaranteed.