

Oral Statement by the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL)
Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
35th Session – Geneva

Madam Chair, Distinguished Members of the Committee,

The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka sincerely appreciates the opportunity to address the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities during its consideration of Sri Lanka's initial report under the Convention.

The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka is the country's independent National Human Rights Institution, established under the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka Act, No. 21 of 1996. In fulfilling our mandate, we monitor the implementation of the Convention through investigations, consultations, accessibility audits, policy advocacy, and engagement with organizations of persons with disabilities across the country.

Since submitting our Parallel Report in 2024, the Commission has continued to monitor developments and has provided the Committee with a Supplementary Report containing updated information.

Madam Chair,

We wish to acknowledge several positive initiatives undertaken by the Government of Sri Lanka, including budgetary allocations for disability-related programmes, efforts to improve accessible public transport, awareness programmes for public officials, and policy initiatives in education and health. However, we observe that the overall implementation of the Convention remains slow and fragmented.

Our foremost concern is that, despite Sri Lanka ratifying the Convention in 2016, comprehensive legislation incorporating the CRPD is still to be enacted. Several draft bills have been prepared over the years but have not been finalized. In September 2023, the Commission presented observations and recommendations with respect to a Draft Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill. However, the Bill is yet to be presented to parliament. We respectfully urge the Committee to recommend that Sri Lanka expedite the enactment of comprehensive legislation that fully incorporates the principles and obligations of the Convention.

Second, the Commission remains concerned that disability governance continues to be approached primarily from a social welfare perspective rather than a human rights perspective. Effective implementation of the Convention requires strong coordination across all sectors of government. We, therefore, reiterate our recommendation that the national coordination mechanism for implementing the Convention be placed within a central institution capable of ensuring a whole-of-government, rights-based approach.

Third, although numerous ministries have adopted disability-related policies and action plans, our consultations with persons with disabilities throughout the country, including through our Sub-Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, consistently reveal that implementation at

the grassroots level remains inadequate. Many persons with disabilities continue to face discrimination, inaccessible public services, and severe barriers to education, employment, healthcare, transportation, and justice, particularly in rural, plantation, and conflict-affected areas.

Accessibility continues to be one of the most significant challenges. Despite existing legislation, regulations, and Supreme Court decisions recognizing accessibility rights, compliance remains inconsistent. The Commission has established Accessibility Audit Teams in every district and has conducted nationwide accessibility assessments. Based on these findings, we have recommended stronger monitoring mechanisms, stricter enforcement of accessibility standards, improved accessible transport, inclusive digital services, and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in planning and implementation processes.

Madam Chair,

The Commission also wishes to draw attention to several groups requiring particular protection.

Women with disabilities continue to experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and require greater access to protection services, accessible shelters, reproductive healthcare, and economic opportunities.

Children with disabilities continue to encounter significant barriers to inclusive education due to inadequate resources, insufficient trained teachers, inaccessible infrastructure, and limited support services.

We also remain concerned about the situation of persons with disabilities during disasters and humanitarian emergencies. Our monitoring following Cyclone Dithwa revealed that many temporary shelters and emergency relief mechanisms were not accessible or responsive to the needs of persons with disabilities.

Moreover, reliable disability data remains inadequate. For example, existing data collection methodologies do not capture children below the age of five and fail to provide comprehensive information necessary for evidence-based policymaking.

Finally, the Commission is concerned that the current national monitoring arrangements do not fully satisfy the independence requirements of article 33(2) of the Convention. We respectfully recommend the establishment of an independent monitoring mechanism that complies with both the Convention and the Paris Principles.

Madam Chair and distinguished Committee Members,

The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka remains committed to working constructively with the government, organizations of persons with disabilities, civil society, and international partners to advance the full realization of the rights guaranteed under the Convention.

We thank the Committee for its continued engagement and respectfully request that our findings and recommendations be taken into consideration during the constructive dialogue and in the Committee's Concluding Observations.

Thank you.