# Opening remarks – Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

## 15 August – 9 September 2022

**Speaker:** Alex Schröder

**Speech length:** 3 minutes (approx. 421 words)

**Date:** 23 August 2022

**Time:** 3pm – 6pm (CET)

**Speaker Order:** 1. DPOC (Jonathan Godfrey)
2. HRC (Esther Woodbury)
3. OOTO (Alex Schröder)

**Notes:** Your speech will follow on from the Human Rights Commission.

**Salutations**

E ngā mana, e ngā reo, e ngā rau rangatira i konei

Ko Alex Schröder tōku ingoa

No Aotearoa ahau

Tēna koutou, tēna koutou, tēna koutou katoa

* My name is Alex Schröder and I am the ‘Assistant Ombudsman Communications, Learning and Accessibility’, from the New Zealand Ombudsman’s office. The Ombudsman is one of New Zealand’s three IMM partners.
* I would like to echo my colleagues’ gratitude to the Chair, United Nations Disability Committee Members, fellow colleagues and civil society participating in New Zealand’s periodic review.

**Introduction**

* As our world changes and adapts to different challenges, such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic, New Zealand’s government must ensure disabled people have what they need to live full lives and realise their full suite of human rights, as set out in the Disability Convention.
* Today, I wish to draw the Committee’s attention to the barriers disabled New Zealanders experience in making decisions about their own lives and preserving their integrity.

**Article 17 – Protecting the integrity of the person**

* Article 17 of the Disability Convention provides that disabled people are entitled to have their physical and mental integrity to be respected. They must be treated on an equal basis with all others. Disabled people should be at the centre of all decisions made about their lives and be supported to make decisions about matters that affect their health, wellbeing and integrity. However, this is not always the reality.
* Disabled people in New Zealand:
	+ Continue to experience substitute decision-making practices.
	+ Continue to experience disproportionately high rates of violence and abuse, compared to non-disabled people.
	+ Continue to undergo medical procedures without informed consent, including involuntary sterilisation.
	+ Continue to experience inequities in life expectancy. People with learning disabilities can expect their lives to be shorter by around 20 years compared to the general population.
* There has been progress. This includes recognition of some of these issues in Action Plans and reviews of relevant legislation. This is encouraging. However, for disabled people to have control over their own lives and bodies, supported decision-making should be embraced and enshrined in law. The lack of progress on involuntary sterilisation and other non-therapeutic treatments is particularly alarming, and until prohibitive legislation is enacted, a moratorium on these practices should be put in place.
* The current state of affairs is not acceptable, it cannot be acceptable, and shows how much work New Zealand needs to do to ensure disabled people realise their full suite of human rights.

**Close**

* All New Zealanders, including disabled people in New Zealand, have the right to make decisions about their own lives. The existence of disability should not justify a denial of human rights. Making this a priority is the right thing to do.

[Ends, 450 words – around 3 minutes]