CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

**Twenty-fourth session**

**8 March 2021**

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**Opening Statement by**

**Mr. Ibrahim Salama**

**Chief, Human Rights Treaties Branch**

**Human Rights Council and Treaty Mechanisms Division (OHCHR)**

**Representative of the Secretary-General**

**Videoconference**

**8 March 2021, 12:30 pm (Geneva time)**

Chair,

Distinguished members of the Committee,

Colleagues and Friends,

On behalf of the United Nations Secretary-General and the High Commissioner for Human Rights, it is an honour for me to open the twenty-fourth session of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which is taking place online with webcasting of public meetings. This is the second online session for the Committee and will be carried out from today, 8 March until 1 April 2021.

I wish to extend a warm welcome to the seven new members of the Committee who were elected during the 13th Conference of State Parties and started their mandate on 1 January 2021: Ms. Rosa Idalia Aldana Salguero, Ms. Soumia Amrani, Ms. Gerel Dondovdorj, Ms. Vivian Fernández De Torrijos, Ms. Odelia Fitoussi*,* Mr. Floyd Morris, and Ms. Saowalak Thongkuay.

I also take this opportunity to congratulate the re-elected members of the Committee namely Mr. Samuel Kabue and Mr. Robert Martin.

With the results of the December 2020 election, the gender composition of the Committee has changed to 12 women among 18 members.

Distinguished members,

 Please allow me to brief you on the most important recent events and developments related to disability rights at the international level.

On 16 December 2020, the General Assembly adopted Resolution A/RES/75/154 on inclusive development for and with persons with disabilities, urging Member States, United Nations agencies, and other stakeholders, in cooperation with persons with disabilities, to ensure that the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is inclusive of, and accessible to, persons with disabilities. The General Assembly also called upon Member States and other stakeholders to include persons with disabilities in all stages of policy making and decision-making related to COVID-19 response and recovery, as well to eliminate barriers and discrimination against persons with disabilities in accessing support and health-care services.

In October 2020, the Human Rights Council appointed Mr. Gerard Quinn as the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Mr. Quinn is a well-known international expert in the field of disability rights and was actively involved in the drafting process the Convention. In his first appearance before the General Assembly, Mr. Quinn indicated that one of his priorities would be to ensure that the voices of persons with disabilities are understood and taken into account in responses by the international community to common threats including the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and armed conflicts. I understand that since his appointment, the Committee and the Special Rapporteur have been in close contact.

Distinguished members,

The Bridging the Gap Project within Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rightshas come to an end and a complete resource package was launched at the end of December 2020 to ensure that all actions for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, or Sustainable Development Goals, are inclusive of persons with disabilities and are guided by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The package includes numerous tools such as policy guidelines, training materials, human rights indicators to measure implementation of the Convention, and examples of different sources of data to inform human rights indicators.

During this inter-sessional period, our Office has continued working together with concerned departments and entities across the United Nations to ensure that accessibility standards are fully included in the procurement of, and operalising, online platforms.. In February 2021, our Office established a procedure for the provision of reasonable accommodation for the participation of members with disabilities in official online meetings. All these activities are part of our implementation of the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights continues implementing a joint project on developing guidelines for Independent Monitoring Mechanisms. This project is possible thanks to the Multi-Partner Trust Fund of the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which brings together nine United Nations entities to work collaboratively on supporting disability-inclusive development.

Distinguished Committee members,

I would like to commend you for the Committee’s efforts in addressing strategic issues related to the implementation of the Convention, in partnership with other United Nations disability-related mandates. In this regard, I welcome the adoption of the International Principles and Guidelines on access to justice for persons with disabilities, launched jointly at the end of August 2020 with the former Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility. I also congratulate the Committee for issuing, with the same partners, a joint press release on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, emphasizing that response and recovery efforts to the COVID-19 pandemic should be inclusive and fully take into account the views of persons with disabilities to be effective.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the commitment to work collaboratively with other human rights treaty bodies and United Nations entities. For instance, in October 2020, UNWomen, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, and your Committee issued the joint statement “Ending sexual harassment against women and girls with disabilities” and I note your ongoing collaboration with the Committee on the Rights of the Child through a joint working group on children with disabilities.

Distinguished members,

The time and efforts this Committee has devoted during this exceptional period to avoid a human rights protection gap by participating in online sessions, despite the variations in time zones and technological difficulties, are greatly appreciated. In particular, I commend this Committee’s decision, along with that of six other treaty bodies, to test online State party reviews on an exceptional basis while in-person meetings are not possible due to the pandemic. I wish you every success for the first-ever online dialogue that you will hold with Estonia this week.

At the last meeting of the Chairs of the treaty bodies, on 14 December 2020, the Chairs discussed the two recommendations of the co-facilitators appointed by the President of the General Assembly: that its, (1) the parameters for a schedule of predictable review cycles taking into account that the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Human Rights Committee have already decided to introduce such cycles, and (2) aligned working methods based on previous discussions of the Chairs.

The Chairs also highlighted the continuing challenges that they and their respective treaty bodies faced with on-line meetings, pointing out that to be able to conduct constructive, substantive dialogues with States parties online, they need to be empowered with appropriate online platforms. We are working with our UN partners to ensure that on dialogues are interactive, accessible to persons with disabilities, transparent and participatory. In this regard, the Chairs urged Member States to ensure the establishment of a dedicated online platform for all mandated activities of treaty bodies.

I am please to inform you that last Friday the Assistant Secretary General for OICT authorized the use of Zoom, on an exceptional basis, for the 24th session of CRPD.

Distinguished members,

Most regrettably I need to inform you that the regular budget recently adopted by the General Assembly for 2021 did not approve the requested staff resources to support the increased workload of treaty bodies, mainly related to individual communications. Despite this highly unfortunate situation, our Office and my most dedicated collagues continue to do our utmost to ensure adequate support for your work and actively look for solutions.

Dear Members,

You have an intense program ahead of you for the next four weeks. You will engage in your constructive dialogue with Estonia, discuss and adopt crucial recommendations and decisions on individual communications. In addition, you will have a public General discussion on the right to work and employment and will continue your work in working groups and task forces.

We sincerely appreciate the flexibility and receptiveness you have demonstrated in these exceptional and challenging circumstances.

I extend my best wishes to all of you for a successful and productive online session.

Thank you.

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