

20 Years of the CRPD: Celebrating Progress and Shaping the Next Phase of Implementation

Thank you for the opportunity to join the commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

The Convention has become one of the most widely supported international treaties. Today, 183 States Parties have ratified or acceded to the CRPD, demonstrating an unprecedented global commitment to advancing the cause for the rights of over one billion persons with disabilities.

Over the two decades, the CRPD has fundamentally changed how the world understands and deals with disability—from a charity or health focused issue to a matter of rights, equality, and full participation in society and development for all. This special occasion provides us as State Parties a unique opportunity- not only to celebrate achievements, but also to reflect on how far we have come and what remains to be done.

First, the CRPD has driven remarkable progress in national legal and policy development. Since 2006, notable progress has been gained in nearly all countries worldwide. Many countries, in line with the CRPD, revised their constitutions, enacted anti-discriminatory legislation, strengthened accessibility standards, adopted inclusive education policies, and reformed laws on employment, political participation, and independent living.

Second, disability has been increasingly recognized and included in major global development agendas. In 2015, people with disabilities were explicitly included for the first time in global development commitments. Today, seven SDG targets explicitly reference persons with disabilities in the 2030 Agenda, covering education, employment, reducing inequalities, accessible public spaces, and data collection. Likewise, the international community also committed to the rights of persons with disabilities and advancing disability inclusive development in other international instruments, for instance, in the Political Declaration of the Second Social Development Summit and the Seville Commitments. All of these represent a lofty promise of leaving no one behind.

Third, over the decades, the work on accessibility has, slowly but consistently, expanded and deepened, from mainly physical infrastructure to include digital technologies, information, communication, transportation, and public services. Universal design is increasingly recognized as a prerequisite for inclusive societies rather than an optional accommodation.

Disability inclusion and accessibility is gradually embraced as a good and smart practice in development and societies.

Fourth, which is very critical in our view is that persons with disabilities and their representative organizations are now increasingly recognized as essential partners in designing, implementing, and monitoring laws and policies. Meaningful participation of persons with disabilities, as important agents of changes, is contributing to sustainable development and resilient societies. All these illustrative achievements demonstrate that the CRPD has influenced our policies and practices, furthermore they also reshaped international cooperation.

While progress has been substantial, the work is far from complete. The latest UN Flagship Report on Disability and Development reminds us that persons with disabilities continue to experience significant disparities in education, employment, health care, food security, digital access, and access to energy.

Our progress made so far has been limited and uneven, and many Sustainable Development Goal targets remain off track for persons with disabilities.

The scale of the challenge is enormous.

As we look to the next decades, we must enhance our actions and efforts. First and foremost, is move beyond commitments to full implementation. Strong legislation and policies must be accompanied by adequate financing, effective institutions, measurable indicators, and accountability mechanisms.

Second, investing in accessibility and universal design—not only in physical infrastructure, but also in digital technologies, artificial intelligence, public services, transportation, education, healthcare, and emergency preparedness.

Third, further international cooperation and ensure that persons with disabilities are fully included in emerging global priorities.

Sri Lanka's commitment to the CRPD rests on a foundation laid well before our ratification of the Convention in 2016.

Today, Sri Lanka is working to strengthen this framework. New disability rights legislation is being advanced to bring our domestic law fully into line with the Convention. Our national disability policy and action plan are being renewed. We have prioritized dignified living conditions and institutional infrastructure improvements. We strongly promote rehabilitation, empowerment, and reintegration of persons of disability.

Dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

The next twenty years must be defined not by new commitments alone, but by measurable improvements in the everyday lives of persons with disabilities. The CRPD has shown that transforming societies is possible, with commitment, determined efforts and actions on the ground.

Our collective responsibility now is to accelerate implementation so that every person with a disability can enjoy equal opportunities, exercise their rights, and participate fully in every aspect of society.

The next chapter of the CRPD is therefore about delivering on the promise.

Thank you.