

17th Session of the Conference of States Parties to the CRPD
Opening Session: Civil Society Statement
11 June 2024
Statement by Sanja Tarczay

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, colleagues and friends,

Allow me to begin by sharing a personal reflection. As a representative of civil society and the disability movement, I stand before you with a deep sense of responsibility and determination. I speak not only for myself but for over 1.3 billion people worldwide—16% of the global population—who live with a disability. Our collective goal is clear: to build a world that is inclusive, accessible, and participatory for all.

The landscape of disability inclusion is evolving, presenting us with multifaceted challenges. From barriers to accessibility and systemic discrimination to gaps in data collection and representation, the road to true inclusion is loaded with obstacles. However, it is precisely in these challenges that we find the opportunity for meaningful change.

In recent years, we have witnessed unprecedented events, including pandemics, conflicts, and many other setbacks that have disproportionately affected persons with disabilities. Despite these challenges, significant progress has been made in advancing our rights.

However, at the national level, persons with disabilities continue to face numerous challenges in realizing their rights under the CRPD and the SDGs. Financial restrictions often lead to cuts in services and reduced social protection. The implementation of Agenda 2030 remains incomplete and excludes many persons with disabilities. Moreover, conflict and political turmoil perpetuate human rights violations, and the impact of climate change increases vulnerabilities, highlighting the urgent need for inclusive disaster risk reduction strategies.

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Yesterday, at the Civil Society Forum, representatives from diverse sectors convened to discuss these challenges and opportunities. We issued a unified call to States, emphasizing the non-negotiable nature of the CRPD and the imperative of meaningful participation for persons with disabilities.

Allow me to make a special mention of underrepresented groups of persons with disabilities. As a woman with deafblindness, I am deeply aware that certain disability groups face additional challenges, including lack of access to specific services, insufficient technical understanding and resources, and isolation.

I want to emphasize the importance of acknowledging and addressing the intersecting identities and experiences of persons with disabilities. An intersectional approach is essential to understanding and addressing the unique challenges faced by individuals who face multiple forms of discrimination. If we fail to do this, we will risk leaving groups of people behind and ignoring their realities.

Looking ahead to the Summit of the Future, we must reimagine our approach to disability inclusion on the global stage. We must move beyond rhetoric and token gestures toward concrete, sustainable action that leaves no one behind. This summit represents a unique opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities, strengthen cooperation, and forge a path towards a more inclusive future for all.

But let us be clear: true inclusion requires more than words. It demands a fundamental shift in mindset, policy, and practice. We must center the voices of persons with disabilities and amplify their perspectives.

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To summarise, I would like to highlight some of the key messages we wish to share today:

- It is imperative to ensure the meaningful and genuine involvement of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in all decision-making processes, from the outset.
- We call for increased funding and improved services for persons with disabilities, as poverty and exclusion remain significant challenges.
- Partnerships must be created and strengthened with diverse organizations of persons with disabilities, including marginalized groups such as women and persons with deafblindness.
- Capacity building of organizations of persons with disabilities is essential, and successful practices must receive additional support and dissemination.
- Official statistical bodies must collect and disaggregate data by disability, harmonize disability data, and recognize the importance of citizen-generated data led by organizations of persons with disabilities.
- We call for the translation of the CRPD into regional and national laws to ensure the legal anchoring of our human rights.

It is evident that collaboration is key to our success. We cannot do this alone. We need the support and cooperation of our States to advance disability inclusion and transform our societies.

As civil society representatives, we have a vital role to play in driving this change forward. Let us continue to advocate tirelessly for the rights of persons with disabilities, hold governments and institutions

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accountable, and push for policies that reflect the principles of equality, dignity, and justice for all.

In closing, let us remember that the work we do here today is not just about policies and procedures; it is about people—the millions of individuals around the world whose lives are impacted by disability every day. It is about building a world where every person has the opportunity to thrive and contribute fully to society.

Together, let us rise to the challenge before us, and together, pave the way for a future where disability inclusion is not just a goal, but a reality for all.

Thank you.
