

14 COSP. Side Event “**Protecting the Rights of Persons with Disabilities during Pandemics and Crises**”.

Organized by: League of Arab States (LAS), the State of Kuwait and ESCWA, and the Arab Organization of Persons with Disabilities.

14 June 2021

Good morning to everyone:

The Special Envoy of the Secretary General of the United Nations on Disability and Accessibility, apologizes for not being able to be here, and has asked me to deliver her message, on behalf of the Secretary General of the United Nations.

She thanks all the organizers for the invitation to this important event.

Her message:

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities establishes that “States Parties shall take, in accordance with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including situations of armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies and natural disasters” (art 11 of CRPD).

This article covers two obligations:

- 1.- States Parties must adopt all possible measures; and
- 2.- The purpose of these measures shall guarantee the safety and protection of persons with disabilities in the indicated cases, which obviously applies during pandemics and other crises.

It is fundamental to highlight that the human rights of persons with disabilities cannot be suspended during situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies, nor is suspended the effective response of States with regard to the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. In fact, in order to advance this agenda, States shall adopt specific measures with regard to guarantee a healthy life and the well-being of all persons at all ages; equitable inclusive quality education and decent work with fair pay. States shall also promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, facilitate access to justice for all, and build effective and accountable inclusive institutions at all levels.

Human rights obligations and compliance with sustainable development, during and after pandemics, require that States face these challenges by placing the person with disabilities and their diversity at the center of public policies, based on the principles of non-discrimination, transversality, intersectionality, participation of persons with disabilities in solutions, data collection and statistics as a quantitative and qualitative basis to improve policies, strategic plans and actions, as well as accountability.

The pandemic has exposed the most complex barriers that persons with disabilities face, such as those related to health care, services and distance education, often in terms of lack of technology. However, even having access to technology, persons with disabilities face difficulties in finding jobs and enjoying different aspects of social security, that not always are sufficient to satisfy their needs.

For these reasons, the alliance among central governments, local governments and civil society of persons with disabilities, including their representative organizations, is vital for good governance in times of pandemics and after emergencies, enabling networking for optimizing material resources and human capital in the different communities.

Congratulations for organizing this side event and for the substantial contribution that is being done here, for the Arab Region, today. Shukrana.

Prof. María Soledad Cisternas Reyes
Special Envoy of the UNSG on Disability and Accessibility