

**14th Session of the Conference of States Parties
to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.**

**Statement – Opening of the Conference of States Parties.
15 June 2021. 10.00 - 13.00 pm (Virtual).**

María Soledad Cisternas Reyes, Special Envoy of the SGNU on Disability and Accessibility

Good morning, everyone:

In the 13 COSP I maintained and continue to maintain that a “global big data” to address the critical situation of accessibility during and after the pandemic, will be a very useful legacy to face other humanitarian emergencies, allowing our communities and governments to identify the connection between accessibility, human rights and sustainable development.

The Secretary General of the United Nations established 10 priorities for the year 2021. I want to focus on three of them to make visible their link to persons with disabilities.

First, tackle the pandemic of poverty and inequality. The Secretary-General notes that more than 70 percent of the world's population experiences growing wealth inequality. We know that 80 percent of people with disabilities live in developing countries, increasing the disability-poverty-marginality circle. For this reason, it is important to call on the states to satisfy the needs of our movement, since persons with disabilities are usually the poorest of the poor and, therefore, must be at the center of public policies, always ensuring their effective participation and that of their organizations, with the support of international cooperation.

The role of local governments is and will continue to be very important in channeling these needs, and in ensuring the full exercise of the rights of persons with disabilities, with the strong support of central governments. We appreciate the great contribution of United Cities and Local Governments in this matter.

Regarding the priority of achieving gender equality indicated by the Secretary General, I reiterate the call to UN Women. I insist on this, since the resolution of the Commission on the Juridical and Social Status of Women did not sufficiently address the issue of women and girls with disabilities, nor our cry for full and effective participation of women and girls with disabilities in the “Generation Equality Forum” -held in Mexico-. We are confident that the next Forum, programmed for July 2021, will strongly consider women and girls with disabilities. We cannot continue to "be left behind."

Another priority for the Secretary General is to reverse the “attack” on human rights. In this sense, it is very important to make visible that persons with disabilities face human rights violations that are usually covered up, through actions or omissions.

In this regard, access to justice is essential for persons with disabilities, both in the work of the courts and in the treatment by the police. This has been a central theme of my mandate.

Furthermore, in the spirit of an effective contribution to promoting the effectiveness of the democratic rule of law, I am pleased to make available to Member States, civil society and all stakeholders, the campaign “For an inclusive quality police services for persons with disabilities”. This campaign is very useful and will need a wide dissemination.

Finally, I will refer to inclusive quality education. The pandemic exposed the inequities to the detriment of students with disabilities: distance education is only possible through technology, which not all have access to. But even with the technology, many times students are marginalized due to lack of accessibility. For example, lack of accessibility with regard to sign language interpretation in classes, audio description, and augmentative or alternative language. Here again I make the call: technology is not a luxury but a human right, especially for students with disabilities. Lack of accessibility is a form of structural abuse.

The process of returning to school in person must respond effectively to students with disabilities who "were left behind" for the reasons mentioned above.

Another challenge for educational environments will be the eradication of violence and harassment against students with disabilities, who will return in person to school and with some disadvantages, which can make them more susceptible to bullying. The commitment of my mandate for this year is to continue to work hard on this particular form of human rights violation.

Thank you very much.

