**61st Session of the Commission on the Status of Women**

**Side Event Concept Note**

**“Working to improve our own future”: Strengthening networks of women with disabilities in humanitarian action**

**Monday 20th March 2017, 1:15pm – 2:30pm in Conference Room B**

**Organized by:** Women’s Refugee Commission; Australian Mission to the United Nations in New York; Finnish Mission to the United Nations in New York; UN Women

**Brief description of side event**

Organizations of women with disabilities can play a critical role in reaching women and girls with disabilities affected by crisis and conflict. Such work can bridge the development – humanitarian divide in an emergency and strengthen community resilience in protracted crisis. This side event will highlight pilot actions undertaken to strengthen the leadership of grass-roots organizations of women with disabilities from crisis-affected countries in humanitarian and development action. Women with disabilities affected by crisis and / or working with displaced communities will share their experiences, opportunities and ongoing challenges. Furthermore, this side event will explore the roles and responsibilities of governments, international bodies, and civil society in strengthening the capacity of these organizations, including strategies to foster the economic empowerment and independence of organizations of women with disabilities.

**Concept Note**

**Background**

Women and girls from crisis-affected communities continue to be left behind in both development and humanitarian action. Women and girls with disabilities, an estimated 19% of the population,[[1]](#footnote-1) face multiple forms of discrimination, adding to their risk of violence, abuse and exploitation.[[2]](#footnote-2) [[3]](#footnote-3) The voices of women and girls with disabilities from crisis-affected communities are often not heard, let alone given the opportunity to participate in or lead decision-making, thus making them one of the most marginalized groups in society.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) provides the human rights framework for the empowerment and realisation of the rights and development of women and girls with disabilities, as both agents and beneficiaries of development and humanitarian action. Article 6 recognizes the multiple forms of discrimination faced by women and girls with disabilities, and requires state parties to ensure their full development and empowerment. Furthermore, the CRPD mandates state parties to ensure the protection and safety of women and girls with disabilities in situations of risk and humanitarian crises (Article 11); that protection services are age-, gender- and disability-sensitive (Article 16); and that international cooperation is “inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities” (Article 32).[[4]](#footnote-4) The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities’ General comment No. 3, on Article 6 - Women and girls with disabilities, further addresses violence against women with disabilities situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies.[[5]](#footnote-5) It also notes that  “the recommendations of the relevant United Nations bodies dealing with gender equality shall be taken into account by all States parties and applied to women and girls with disabilities”.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action recognize disability as a barrier to full equality and advancement, and the enjoyment of human rights,[[7]](#footnote-7) and identify specific actions to ensure the empowerment of women with disabilities in various areas.[[8]](#footnote-8) The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women’s General recommendation No. 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations, notes that certain groups of women, including women with disabilities are especially vulnerable to increased economic hardship, and often lack employment and means and opportunities for economic survival.[[9]](#footnote-9)  It recommends, among other things, that States Parties: “Address the specific risks and particular needs of different groups of internally displaced and refugee women, subjected to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, including women with disabilities”.[[10]](#footnote-10)

In The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015 – 2030, has recognized the need for, and [committed to](http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/humanitarian-action/global-norms-and-standards#disasters), a strong focus on gender equality and women’s rights, as well as to disability inclusive disaster risk reduction. One of its guiding principles is that “a gender, age, disability and cultural perspective should be integrated in all policies and practices, and women and youth leadership should be promoted”.[[11]](#footnote-11) Furthermore, it recognizes the importance of empowering women and persons with disabilities to take on greater leadership roles in response, recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Similarly, the Agenda for Humanity calls upon stakeholders to reach everyone in situations of conflict, disasters, vulnerability and risk and highlights efforts to empower and protect women and girls, and to strengthen their participation in decision making.[[13]](#footnote-13) Commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit (in May 2016), including increased funding to women’s groups, must be inclusive of women and girls with disabilities and their representative organizations. The Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, endorsed by more than 140 stakeholders, contains commitments to gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda acknowledges the negative impact that humanitarian crisis can have on development progress, and in building effective, accountable and inclusive communities. These goals call upon States to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, and recognize inclusion of persons with disabilities in commitments to economic growth and livelihoods.[[14]](#footnote-14) In connection to this, the 2016 Commission on the Status of Women’s Agreed Conclusions on *Women’s Empowerment and the link to Sustainable Development*, urges all actors to take appropriate measures to protect and promote the rights of all women and girls with disabilities, ensuring their full and effective participation and inclusion in society, and to address the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination they face. It also urges to ensure the rights and specific needs of women and girls affected and displaced by emergency situations, including humanitarian emergencies, are addressed in every humanitarian response.[[15]](#footnote-15)

In 2016, the Women ‘s Refugee Commission and UN Women conducted a pilot project supporting networks of women with disabilities from South Asia and Africa to advocate on the issues of women and girls with disabilities affected by crisis and conflict in development, humanitarian and human rights forums, at national, regional and global levels. This pilot project demonstrated the skills and capacities that grass-roots organizations of women with disabilities bring in reaching and advocating for the most marginalized women and girls in their communities, particularly those displaced by crisis and conflict. These same organizations, however, face a vicious cycle of lack of funding, which in turn limits their organizational capacity.

As crises and forced displacement escalate globally,[[16]](#footnote-16) we must recognize the intersection between humanitarian and development action, and implement strategies to reach displaced women and girls with disabilities. Organizations of women with disabilities, from communities affected by conflict, crisis and displacement, can play a critical role in bridging the development – humanitarian divide in an emergency, but also in strengthening community resilience in situations of protracted crisis. We must now upscale pilot actions which strengthen leadership and empowerment of grass-roots groups, prioritizing them in economic empowerment initiatives which will enable them to in turn contribute much-needed expertise and skills, and to assume greater leadership roles in these spheres.

**Objectives of the side event**

This side event on ***strengthening networks of women with disabilities in humanitarian action*** will provide an opportunity for States, UN agencies and civil society to:

* Share positive outcomes from pilot initiatives to strengthen women with disabilities’ leadership, empowerment, access and protection in crisis response;
* Identify ongoing gaps and opportunities to strengthen the role of women with disabilities from communities affected by crisis and conflict in development and humanitarian action; and,
* Provide concrete recommendations to ensure that global commitments to advance women’s economic empowerment are inclusive of grass-roots organizations of women with disabilities from crisis-affected communities.

The side event builds on priority actions defined in the Global Meeting on “Implementation of Global Development and Humanitarian Goals – the Leadership Role of Women with Disabilities” conducted at the 9th Conference of State Parties to the CRPD in June 2016. Most notably, women with disabilities called for the expansion of capacity building programs, with specific reference to inclusion in women’s leadership and economic empowerment initiatives.[[17]](#footnote-17)

**Speakers**

**Moderator: Donald Steinberg** – Current president and CEO of World Learning, past Deputy Administrator to USAID and former US Ambassador.

* **Ambassador Kai Sauer**, Permanent Representative of Finland to the UN
* **Ms. Sarah Goulding**, Assistant Secretary of the Gender Equality Branch, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Government of Australia
* **Mr. A.H. Monjurul Kabir**, Programme Advisor/Head of Section, Asia and the Pacific, Programme Division, UN Women
* **Ms. Rama Dhakal**, Nepal Disabled Women’s Association (NDWA) and a member of the South Asian Disability Forum
* **Ms. Sarah Costa**, Executive Director, Women’s Refugee Commission

1. World Health Organization and the World Bank (2011) World Report on Disability. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Women’s Refugee Commission, *Disability inclusion: Translating policy into practice in humanitarian action* (New York, WRC 2014). Women’s Refugee Commission and International Rescue Committee, *“I see that it is possible”: Building capacity for disability inclusion in gender-based violence programming in humanitarian settings* (New York, WRC 2015). Human Rights Watch, *“As if we weren’t human”: Discrimination and violence against women with disabilities in Northern Uganda* (New York, HRW 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ortoleva, Stephanie and Lewis, Hope, *“Forgotten Sisters- A Report on Violence Against Women with Disabilities: An Overview of its Nature, Scope, Causes and Consequences*” (August 21, 2012). Northeastern University School of Law Research Paper No. 104-2012. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2133332>. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, General Comment No. on Article 6, Women and girls with disabilities (CRPD/C/GC/3), under Art. 11, paragraphs 49-50. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid. paragraph 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Beijing declaration and platform for action: adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women: action for equality, development and peace, Beijing, China, 4-15 September 1995. (1995). Beijing: United Nations, paragraphs 46 and 225. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid. paragraphs 60(a), 175(d), 280(c), 82(k), 106(c), 106(o), 124(m), 126(d), 178(f), 178(j), 195(a), 206(k), 101, 233(a), 233(b), 81(a), 278(d). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women’s [General recommendation No. 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/CEDAW/GComments/CEDAW.C.CG.30.pdf) (CEDAW/C/GC/30), paragraph 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid. paragraph 57 (b). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015 – 2030, Guiding Principles, paragraph 19 (d). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ibid. Priority 4: Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to “Build Back Better” in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction, paragraph 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. <https://consultations.worldhumanitariansummit.org/bitcache/e49881ca33e3740b5f37162857cedc92c7c1e354?vid=569103&disposition=inline&op=view> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. <http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. <http://www2.unwomen.org/~/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/60/csw60%20agreed%20conclusions%20conclusions%20en.pdf?v=1&d=20160915T144409> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Over 65.3 million people are now displaced worldwide because of persecution, conflict, generalized violence, and human rights violations <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/statistics/unhcrstats/576408cd7/unhcr-global-trends-2015.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Summary Document of the Global Meeting: “Implementation of Global Development and Humanitarian Goals – the Leadership Role of Women with Disabilities”, 9th Conference of State Parties to the CRPD, Tuesday 14th June 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)