



Chair's Summary
High Level Panel Discussion on the Emerging Issues

**The empowerment of people affected by natural and human-made disasters to reduce inequality:
Addressing the differential impact on persons with disabilities, older persons and youth**

Wednesday 13 February 2019, 10am to 1pm
United Nations Headquarters, New York



Under the agenda item Emerging Issues, the Commission convened a high-level panel “The empowerment of people affected by natural and human-made disasters to reduce inequality: Addressing the differential impact on persons with disabilities, older persons and youth”. Moderated by **Charlotte McClain-Nhlapo**, Global Disability Adviser at the World Bank Group’s Social, Urban, Rural and Resilience Global Practice, the panel featured 4 panellists: **Mesbah Ansari Dogaheh**, Head of Office for Social Development, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Iran; **Mosharraf Hossain**, Director of Global Policy, Influencing and Research, in the Action on Disability and Development International; **Marcie Roth**, President and CEO of Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies; and **Lisa Marsh Ryerson**, President of the AARP Foundation. **Abdullah Eren**, Chief Adviser to the President of Turkey and Director of the Turkish Agency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities; and **Jolly Amatya**, member of the National Youth Council of Nepal, Executive Director of the Sustainable Fish Farming Initiative and representative of the United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth were lead discussants.

The moderator reflected on the importance of further exploring the impact of disasters on vulnerable groups, as well as the role played by social policies. Globally, the world is increasingly witnessing the frequent occurrence of natural and human-made disasters, and more than 350 million people are impacted by disasters and conflicts each year. While all populations face the risk of exposure, one’s real risk is often determined by social factors. Meanwhile, the impact of disasters especially on vulnerable groups impacts the ability of States to achieve the goals enshrined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Panelists referenced international frameworks, including Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR), the Paris Agreement and the work of United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) reflecting how international frameworks put the needs of vulnerable groups (persons with disabilities (PwD), Older Persons (OPs) and youth at the center of response plans. However, many gaps exist, including policy shortfalls that limit adequate response to crises caused by natural and human-made disasters. Panelists

stressed the importance of an inclusive approach by national plans in the preparedness, response and recovery stages of emergencies. The panel discussion engaged representatives of Member States, UN system and civil society organizations to explore ways to empower vulnerable groups and reduce inequalities. The panel called for a paradigm shift involving holistic, coordinated and multi-sectoral approaches to mitigate and lessen the impact of natural and human-made disasters on older persons, youth and persons with disabilities. Participants engaged in a plenary with questions and comments, speakers recounted national experiences with natural and humanmade disasters, ranging from storms to earthquakes to war. Agreeing with the panelists that the poorest, oldest, youngest and most vulnerable citizens are the most exposed to risk, they outlined strategies that worked or did not work to meet their special needs. Some delegates also outlined broader policies, including development and humanitarian assistance, aimed at boosting countries' ability to develop inclusive risk reduction plans.

Mesbah Ansari Dogaheh highlighted the importance of regional normative frameworks such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the Incheon Strategy (UNESCAP- 2012) and the International Day for Disaster Reduction (2013) and UNISDR, which all recognized people with disabilities and older persons as among those highly vulnerable to disasters. Spotlighting good practices, he cited Japan's 2011 earthquake and typhoon during which persons with disabilities were evacuated first and Iran's 2017 earthquake when disability-focused non-governmental organizations provided support on the ground. However, many of the normative frameworks lacked actionable and concrete practices. Many vulnerable groups remain invisible, e.g. in the (earthquake in Kermanshah, Iran in 2017), the focus was more on the needs of children, compared to older persons or persons with disabilities. Emergency response plans that reach out to other vulnerable populations are limited, and when available, they mainly focusing on physically able-bodied persons. The panelist engaged participants on more inclusive measure to adequately respond to vulnerable groups during emergencies, with a focus on those with disabilities. Mr. Dogaheh agreed with other speakers that smaller non-governmental organizations tend to be marginalized. Best practices must be "named and praised", he said, drawing attention to such critical issues as helping people deal with posttraumatic stress disorder after disasters and protecting the service animals on which persons with disabilities rely.

Mosharraf Hossain pointed out that global warming has exacerbated humanitarian consequences. Those who are worst affected by the climate-related hazards and subsequent disasters are people with disabilities, older people, women, and youth. The impact of disaster is higher in people with disabilities. The lack of preparedness and capacity of responding agencies, and limited participation of those affected were among the limitations that hamper adequate response emergencies, with vulnerable population suffer the most. The Impact of a disaster can be reduced through the empowerment of marginalized people. The panelist used case studies of both human-made and natural disasters and their impact on vulnerable populations from his country Bangladesh. Issue-based organizations especially should continue to raise their voices. To effectively respond to such calamities, the panelist proposed: (1) Mobilisation of communities- all stakeholders should be involved, using indigenous knowledge could help effectively respond in such calamities using a "bottom-up approach"; (2) Participation of marginalized people "nothing about us, without us" while addressing inequalities; (3) Formulation of policies for disaster preparedness, response, recovery.

Marcie Roth focused on experience, research and lessons from both governments and community levels on how to enforce disaster reduction and resilience-building strategies. People with disabilities, children, youth and older persons may have access and functional needs- resulting in disproportionate impacts compared to other populations. Climate change must be holistically addressed, accessibility protocols must be introduced, and normative frameworks turned into reality. A tool for inclusive risk reduction was developed by ESCAP UN

inter Agency standing committee on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian actions. The importance of a “whole community” impact approach that can benefit from the contributions from youth, older persons and persons with disabilities who are part of a wider community was stressed. The Sendai Framework recognizes that women and persons with disabilities are not only disproportionately impacted by disasters, but that their knowledge and leadership skills are critical to an adequate disaster response.

Lisa Ryerson focused on older persons and persons with disabilities. In a disaster situation, speed, mobility, quick reactions and easy access to transportation are crucial for survival. Nearly three quarters of the deaths following Hurricane Katrina in 2005 were among people over age 60. Following Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico in 2017, the median age of adults who stayed behind or died was 50 years old and mortality rates were highest for the oldest, poorest residents. The populations of many countries are ageing and that globally the number of people over the age of 60 is expected to surpass 2 billion by 2050. However, older adults who have serious health issues, disabilities or cognitive impairments or who lack transportation may not be able to evacuate when a severe weather event is imminent, making it difficult or impossible for them to reach evacuation sites or get the assistance they need, as evidenced by the disaster related casualties of hurricane Katrina. Empowering older adults should be priorities and plans should be developed with the lens of older persons. Other measures include strong policies, advocacy measure and other logistical preparations that can contribute to an inclusive response. It is equally important to establish long term resiliency in communities through access, aids especially supporting work on the ground. Direct financial assistance and legal aid can empower the most vulnerable, especially older persons. Ms. Ryerson emphasized the importance of intersectionality and called for a reversal of the common idea of persons with disabilities as “problems to be solved, rather than assets to be leveraged”.

Mr. Abdullah Eren expressed that his country operated on an “open door policy” using the experiences of Turkey in response to the Syrian crisis. Turkey provides support to some 4 million Syrians fleeing their country’s conflict. Noting that most affected are children, Turkey uses social educational policies for the empowerment of Syrian youth residing in the country under temporary protection status. Some displaced persons have been reintegrated to the population, as a way of Turkey responding to this humanitarian crisis. Turkey Red Crescent has helped award scholarships to help empower Syrian people, especially youth. As a result, 500 000 Syrian youth were awarded scholarships while the number of youth aged between 15 to 18 years who are ready for transition to higher education exceeds 300.000 in population.

Jolie Amatya stated that the Major Group for Children and Youth (MGCY), is particularly motivated by emerging issues, such as protracted disasters, emergencies yet to be noticed and the “symptoms of an unsustainable world”. The group created the first Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) themed formal youth constituency as a follow up to the world conference on disaster risk reduction. This is a global platform that engages young people to act in humanitarian responses. Embedded in the principles of resilience and sustainability, the group responds to the needs of marginalized populations. As an example, the ASEAN network of DRR, brings together the National Youth Councils with National disaster boards to develop contextspecific educational modules and trainings on disaster monitoring and emergency management. develops context specific modules of responses. The representative also mentioned the importance to include frameworks that can harness the powers of technologies (ICTs) and indigenous knowledge in disaster risk reductions. Broader macroeconomic policies are needed to regulate underlying risk factors for disasters. Nepal was struck by a massive earthquake in 2015 with some 8 million people affected — she said information and communications technology (ICT) deployed by young people became a vital means of overcoming

communication barriers in its aftermath. For example, a Global Position System (GPS) mapping tool helped to expedite relief efforts.

Impact on Youth, Older Persons and Persons with Disabilities

Human-made disasters

Brazil's delegate recalled that just weeks ago a massive dam collapsed in the state of Minas Gervais, killing 65 people and injuring scores of others. In the aftermath of the disaster, the Government worked quickly to minimize the impact on the local population, paying special attention to such vulnerable groups as indigenous communities. When disaster hit, it usually affects the most vulnerable people, the care of children, youth and persons with disabilities is prioritized. There are programmes that help with shelter and social benefits targeting vulnerable populations.

The Secretary of the National Youth Commission in **Philippines** stated that in 2017 around 360 000 people were displaced in the southern city of Marawi due to the long-armed conflict- affecting youth the most. As a result, informal settlements have affected hygiene, food security and resulted in displacements. Philippines task forces have been created to encourage youth participation and help build resilience. This is also a way to instill peace and stability among youth in Marawi. Youth hubs with full budget allocations etc. were established to provide safe spaces especially to the marginalized All these measures were implemented as one way to curb this humanitarian disaster.

Ukraine had military aggressions that resulted in internal displacements the representative of **Ukraine** outlined psychosocial support programmes including mobile outreach teams targeting the most vulnerable people deployed by her Government in the east of the country following military aggression in 2014. A list of steps was taken to protect children and youth affected. In 2019 the Ukraine Humanitarian Plan was adopted to help support citizens in need of humanitarian aid. **Ukraine** noted that social support was provided to persons with disabilities in areas affected by conflict.

The **European Union, France, the United Kingdom, and Switzerland** noted that persons with disabilities are disproportionately negatively impacted by disasters.

Natural Disasters

The representative of the **United Kingdom** mentioned that persons with disabilities are most affected by natural disasters and are more prone to abuse, exploitation and. refusal of service. The Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian action was created for this purpose.

Climate Change

The representative of the **European Union** mentioned that there were policies established targeting vulnerable populations promoting independency and self-reliance- some interventions have directly helped fragile states and IDPs from. The bloc's foreign aid strategy emphasizes the need to go beyond immediate needs, also addressing rehabilitation and development. In Lebanon, for example, the Union is working with

the Government to develop a social assistance programme for the most vulnerable people, including Syrian refugees. In Africa, it is working with countries to tackle the root causes of forced migration. In July 2018, financial guarantee programmes were set up to give support to countries hosting refugees. Similarly, other programmes youth develop skills and help them be more marketable. These have been implemented in Africa with focus on women and youth and persons with disabilities who have been both recipients and participants. 35 Million Euros is earmarked for persons with disabilities affected by the Yemeni crises.

The representative of **France** recalled that a heat wave in the summer of 2018 posed a major threat to many older persons across Europe. Climate change catastrophes disproportionately affect persons with disabilities, youth and older persons. The number of older persons is about 46 percent of the world population- we need to adapt our humanitarian responses to cater to older persons and pay more attention to vulnerable groups. France has a pillar policy (2017) on humanitarian responses which strives to bring assistance to vulnerable persons affected by climate disasters, increase their resilience and enhance civilian protection.

On behalf of youth, the representative **of Switzerland** explained that increased risk was more in poor areas- climate change- human made and natural disasters affect all these groups (youth, persons with disabilities and older persons). In Switzerland, school children were mobilized to protect the environment, to help reduce carbon emissions and reduce global warming. Switzerland has young refugees, who are forced to leave their homes due to climate- this can lead to marginalisation or inequalities. The representative urged Member States to join forces with young people to achieve climate goals. **Switzerland** underlined that climate change disproportionately affects persons with disabilities and called for action address global warming.

Inclusive Humanitarian Response

The **European Union** underlined that the EU and its Member States are committed to ensuring that persons with disabilities are included in humanitarian responses, both as recipients and participants. Persons with disabilities face discrimination and barriers that make them vulnerable in situations of armed conflict. Mainstreaming the needs of persons with disabilities is part of a European consensus on humanitarian aid, as reflected in EU instruments. The EU is a party to the CRPD and is bound to take all necessary measures to support persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including armed conflict. The EU has endorsed the 2016 Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action. Targeted actions are important in ensuring that specific needs are addressed. The EU has supported 35 projects the past years, including supporting refugees with disabilities' access to services in Turkey, rehabilitation in Yemen, and a project in Afghanistan. The EU supports the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Guidelines for Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action and hopes that these guidelines will become a reference within the international community.

France underlined that the inclusion of persons with disabilities is addressed by Principle 17 of the European Pillar of Social Rights proclaimed on 17 November 2017. Persons with disabilities are disproportionately impacted by disasters. There is a need to include persons with disabilities and to protect them in the EU.

Other issues highlighted include, the importance of considering all types of disabilities (not only physical but also mental and psychosocial disabilities) in the context of disaster risk reduction, the need to invest in disaggregated data by disability and identify relevant indicators, the importance of efficiently and effectively allocating sufficient funding, the valuable role of NGOs and DPOs and the need to invest in capacity-building of these organizations and to empower people with disabilities, the value of naming and praising initiatives, and the role of information technology in providing support to persons with disabilities in disaster situations

Morocco noted that within physical disabilities there are many different types of disabilities. In the case of autism, there are many different types of autism which require different measures. It underscored the importance of gathering data to design a proper strategy based on evidence. Morocco has carried out a national survey to gather data on disability, including types of disability. It has established an Observatory on disability and continues to monitor disabilities nationally. A special law has been enacted for the protection of persons with disabilities. Moreover, general cross-sectoral policy for persons with disabilities has been put in place, with the participation of civil society. Regarding the inclusion of persons with disabilities, a key challenge is doing so from a young age. The Ministry of Education has put in place measures in this regard, including a train the trainers programme for children with autism that aims to support both children and their families. Morocco supports the professional inclusion of persons with disabilities, in this regard, national legislation guarantees 7 per cent of persons with disabilities in companies. In 2018, Morocco enacted a new law to provide an income generating programme for the disabled. Morocco also has a law on access to social facilities by persons with disabilities and the elderly. In the health sector, Morocco has mandatory insurance especially for families with a child with disability

The **United Kingdom** noted that Persons with disabilities are often unable to evacuate and do not receive necessary information. Persons with disabilities are at greater risk of abuse, exploitation, and discrimination but are often invisible or excluded from humanitarian response. It recalled that it has endorsed the 2016 Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action. It also noted that in July 2018, the UK co-hosted - along with the International Disability Alliance and the Government of Kenya - the first-ever Global Disability Summit in London. Disaster was a cross-cutting theme at this Summit. In 2018, the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) launched its first Disability Inclusion Strategy that will apply both to DFID's external programs and within the department. It underlined that in promoting fully inclusive evidence-based human responses, it sees five priority areas of action: (1) to promote the collection of disaggregated data to inform evidenced-based policy, (2) to ensure suitable access to essential humanitarian services for persons with disabilities, (3) to place greater focus on mental health and psychosocial disability, which may be brought on by crises and disasters, (4) to advocate for persons with disabilities in all humanitarian crises, and (5) to work with partners in order to ensure that international humanitarian systems comprehensively address disability and adhere to core humanitarian inclusion standards for persons with disabilities

Other issues

Argentina expressed that inequality and poverty exacerbate risk management. The international community should take this into account-As a best practice, Argentina coordinates efforts to respond effectively to reduce risk and damage. Territorial teams are in different provinces across Argentina to promote the organization of work by the communities. This is also done in close collaboration with NGO/CBOs who can help to access the hard to reach populations. Emergency equipment, training, basic responses and impact assessments are used to identify level of damages. One challenge is the availability of disaggregated data- both qualitative and quantitative. The delegate expressed that older persons are especially hard to respond to-as a result the country created the National Platform for Disaster Reduction, this helps carry out international campaigns and help with management of the disaster risk. Argentina also pointed out that this process involves different stakeholders, to increase resilience, prevent risks and improve the lives of those affected.

Morocco-Physical disability and mental disabilities-autism. Morocco provides support to this type of disability, targeting children and families, employment of persons with disabilities, for social solidarity- income generating programs, health care coverage, lifelong health coverage.

Morocco and the **United Kingdom** underlined the importance of distinguishing between and considering both mental and psychological disability and physical disability.

Morocco and the **United Kingdom** underlined the importance of the collection of disaggregated data by disability to inform evidenced-based policy.

The United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) representative pointed out that disasters exacerbate inequalities. Disaster risk is also closely linked to social and economic constructs. DRR is essential in the attainment of SDGs. The implementation of normative frameworks such as the Sendai Framework, are crucial to help vulnerable group participate in disaster responses. He underscored that the Global platform for disaster reduction is to be held in 17 May 2019 and will be an essential platform to continue the debate on humanitarian responses.

