

HOLHUASHI DIALOGUE SUMMARY
“ACCESSIBILITY TO UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS”
29 APRIL 2022

The President of the 76th session of the General Assembly, H.E. Mr. Abdullah Shahid, convened the eighth Holhuashi Dialogue on the theme, “Accessibility to United Nations Headquarters” on Friday, 29 April 2022. Placed below is the summary of the session.

- The United Nations is seen as a model when it comes to establishing rights and norms, including on the issue of disability inclusion. Therefore, it is important to ensure that the UNHQ is in line with the highest standards on accessibility.
- While the UN has generally improved the working conditions and accessibility for those with disabilities at the UNHQ, more needs to be done.
- The issue of accessibility is dynamic, requiring flexibility and urgency when it comes to its implementation. The commitment of Member States and the Secretariat is vital to achieve an acceleration on the implementation, including on improved funding and availability of resources.
- As there is no “one size fits all” approach to address the different needs and expectations for every disability, the conversation on addressing accessibility must include frequent dialogues with people living with disabilities and making them part of the decision-making process so that targeted and practical solutions could be identified and implemented.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has brought on challenges that have negatively impacted on the progress being made on enhancing accessibility to the United Nations. While delegations moved their deliberations to virtual platforms, these were not disabled-proof. Going forward, it is important that the practice of improving accessibility must be applied to both physical and online spaces.
- The topic of accessibility could be further included into the revitalization of the General Assembly and the work of the Fifth Committee. The robust engagement and close collaboration with the Fifth Committee is of paramount importance as it would allow for active participation of all Member States and the scaling up of the political support.
- The Steering Committee on Accessibility (SCA) set up during the 74th session of the General Assembly has brought some awareness and attention to the issue. This allowed for collaboration with the UN Secretariat in closing gaps and aligning with the JIU report recommendations. The possibility of enhancing the status of the Steering Committee, including making it a permanent subsidiary body of the GA should be strongly explored.
- The creation of a network of focal points within the UN Secretariat could help to galvanize support to propel the work forward and to further accelerate efforts when it comes to accessibility.

- Awareness and training to staff and delegates is also a key issue, especially for those in direct contact with staff, delegates and visitors with disabilities.
- Sensitization is also important for delegates in creating an inclusive working environment so that negotiations and other intergovernmental process could be made accessible.
- There should be a number of seats dedicated to delegates and staff with disabilities in the conference rooms and the General Assembly Hall. The Accessibility Center should be strengthened with adequate resources and staffing.
- Frequent thematic discussions on accessibility could contribute to maintaining momentum and drawing attention to the issue.
- An agreed timeline to advance the work surrounding accessibility at the UNHQ would be helpful.