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**COMMONWEALTH DISABLED PEOPLE’S FORUM**

**WOMEN’S DECLARATION (Version 1- 24.03.2023)**

**Introduction**

Greetings from the Commonwealth Disabled People’s Forum (CDPF) & Women’s Forum. CDPF is a Commonwealth Accredited Organisation representing more than **450 million** **disabled people in the 56 countries of the Commonwealth**. [CDPF Members are in 49 Commonwealth Countries with 95 member organisation DPOs, 46 of who are national umbrella DPOs.] Check our website [www.commonwealthdpf.org](http://www.commonwealthdpf.org). The majority of CDPF Executive are Women and they have a Women’s Forum involving women representatives from our member organisations. They developed this Declaration which is endorsed by the CDPF.

The main statutory instrument for challenging **disabilism** is **the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCDPD)**. This has been adopted and ratified by nearly all Commonwealth countries, but its **implementation is slow** **and very patchy**. Even in the 25 countries that have enacted laws on this issue, these are often not put into practice.

This Declaration by CDPF Women Forum reaffirms disabled women and girls’ rights are set out in the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), an International Treaty commonly known as the ‘Bill of Rights for Women’. It was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (GA), further developed in the CEDAW Committee General Recommendations, and adopted, in the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women 1993 (UNDEVW). It also affirms the provision of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Goals (SDG’s), Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and all other policies that advocate for the inclusion of disability rights, especially those touching on disabled women and girls. **However, the goal of universal ratification of the Convention as set out in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, has not been achieved.**

**Commonwealth Disabled People’s Forum (CDPF) and the CDPF Women’s Forum**

CDPF has constituted a Disabled Women’s Forum with members beyond the CDPF Executive Committee. This ensures the voices of disabled women is amplified within the Accredited Commonwealth Women’s Forum, has wider reach of women, establishes linkages and networks with mainstream women’s organizations and movements like Commonwealth Women Forum and UN Women.



CDPF Chair Sarah Kamau speaking at UN CWS Meeting 2023. Gaudence Mushimiyimana & Sarah at Commonwealth CSW side meeting

**CDPF understands that disability is socially created** as disabled people have physical, mental, sensory, psycho-social and other long-term **impairments** that in interaction with attitudinal, environmental and organisational barriers, disable them. **This paradigm shift** away from an individual and medical model approach to a social model/human rights approach to disability is essential to bring about equity and equality for disabled women and girls and disabled people in general. CDPF understands that **sexism** is socially created and must be challenged. Disabled women are often treated unfairly, both because of the **sexism** they are subjected to as women and are disabled. This is why CDPF use disabled people not persons with disabilities.

**The number of Disabled women and girls in the Commonwealth is growing and their exclusion is increasing.** Their low involvement in leadership and decision making, political participation and in public life, in social protection programmes and consideration during humanitarian emergencies and situations of risk, in economic empowerment, work and employment, in inclusive education, health and wellbeing, water, sanitation and hygiene, and in climate change negotiations **that impact on their economic, social and cultural rights. Their low involvement is increasing, especially in low and middle income countries.**

**Disabled Women and Girls**

The World Health Organization reports that 16% of the population are disabled people (1.3 billion people). The 700 million Disabled Women are not a homogenous group. They experience a range of impairments including and not limited to physical, psychosocial, intellectual, and sensory. They also include young girls and older women whose needs vary significantly. Women constitute 75 percent of the disabled people in low- and middle-income countries.

**CDPF Women’s Forum Declaration**

The CDPF Women’s Forum calls on Disabled Women and girls within the Commonwealth and their representative organizations to champion their rights, develop, speak about and prioritize their concerns and support them to become leaders. The CDPF Women’s Forum also calls on the Commonwealth and member Governments to prioritize tackling the barriers disabled women and girls face, to develop long term strategies in areas that affect their lives, so that Disabled Women and Girls can enjoy life on an equal basis with non-disabled women. This requires particular effort to reach marginalised groups such as rural poor, indigenous and DeafBlind disabled women. The achievement of these broad aims requires the following specific provisions.

1. **Disabled Women and Girls**

CDPF Women’s Forum calls upon Commonwealth Heads of Government to take measures to realise the full and equal enjoyment by disabled women and girls of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. They should also take all appropriate measures to ensure the full development, advancement and empowerment of disabled women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of the human rights and fundamental freedoms set out in the CRPD. Disabled women and girls are subject to multiple discriminations.

1. **Access** Disabled women and girls need **access in all areas** and **the free supply of assistive technology** to achieve their rights.
2. **Gender equality, Equity, Non-discrimination and Resourcing**

The CDPF Women’s Forum will seek to enhance measures to ensure disabled women and girls are equal before the law and are entitled, without discrimination, to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law. The Forum will endeavour to ensure that governments shall prohibit all discrimination on the basis of disability and guarantee to disabled people have equal and effective legal protection against discrimination on all grounds, by taking appropriate legal steps and to ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided. Governments are called upon to achieve full gender equality in their policies, plans and programmes and ensure gender mainstreaming, gender responsive budgets and mechanisms to monitor and assess their implementation. Progress on gender equality and women’s rights for disabled women and girls is only possible when there is a strong and effective Disabled Women’s Movement in the Commonwealth. Governments should therefore set aside and provide adequate finances for the Disabled Women’s Movement to carry out advocacy and provide support in favour of disabled women’s rights.

1. **Work and Employment**

CDPF Women’s Forum will endeavor to call on their governments to take measure to include disabled women and girls in employment and work within all sectors on an equal basis with others. This will enable them be economically empowered and will give them the economic independence that will make them participate in development of their countries. Disabled Women must be able to access finances and to be meaningfully engaged in improving their livelihoods. We call on Commonwealth Heads of Government to make available opportunities for disabled women and girls within their governments to access work and employment on an equal basis with others. Governments should also fund organizations of disabled women and girls to operationalize their organizations and impact as many women at the grassroots as possible. To ensure disabled women and girls have employability skills, Governments are called upon to enact and implement laws that promote equity. Women are engaged in unpaid work as care givers to disabled people and to their families. Access to microfinance and grants should be made easily available for women and girls who may not have collateral for bank loans, to enable them to start-up income generating activities and have sustainable livelihoods. CDPF Women’s Forum advocates for governments to ensure their procurement and supply chain processes are easily accessible to Disabled women and girls to achieve socio-economic advancement.

1. **Political Participation, Public Life and Leadership**

CDPF Women’s Forum calls on Commonwealth Heads of Government to support disabled women and girls to participate fully in all election processes and appointments to hold public offices. This will enable their issues and rights to be on the agenda when decisions are taken. It will also increase their numbers and representation in parliaments and other decision-making levels, thus having meaningful inclusion of disabled women and their human rights at high level. CDPF Women’s Forum advocate for an equal level playing field in the political space for disabled women who are disadvantaged by the multiple barriers during the election processes. These include campaigns, political parties’ nominations, inaccessible podiums and environment, communication (transport, language, in accessible communication formats, etc). The Forum will advocate for full and meaningful participation of disabled women and girls and require of them to be speakers and panellists during conferences internationally, regionally and others to represent themselves and their rights at all levels. The Forum call for media to advocate on the role of women in political positions, as key agents for responsive government that promote sustainability.

1. **Health and Gender Based Violence**

CDPF Women’s Forum will call on Commonwealth governments to ensure disabled women and girls enjoy the right to the highest attainable standard of health without discrimination on the basis of disability. It calls on governments to take appropriate measures to ensure disabled women with and girls access health services and facilities easily. Disabled Women should be in control of their sexual and reproductive health issues but not forced into sterilization on the basis of disability and informed consent on the services provided to be obtained. Violence against women is prevalent and more on disabled women and girls with, who experience gender based or sexual violence more than women without disabilities. Disabled Women are two to three times more likely than non-disabled women to experience violence, including by family, intimate partners, caregivers, and institutional facilities (WHO, 2022).

1. **Education**

CDPF Women’s Forum will advocate for governments to ensure an inclusive and quality education system is in place at all levels of education and life-long learning for disabled women and girls without discrimination and are provided with the reasonable accommodation they require consistent with the goal of full inclusion. CDPF calls on governments to ensure curriculum are accessible and responsive to the needs of disabled women and girls. This will help increase enrolment of disabled girls in schools and enhance their retention to complete their schooling period. Vocational training at all levels must be enhanced and teachers should be prepared to train women and girls who are neurodiverse or with learning difficulties to attain skills that will enable them to be included in the communities they live in on an equal basis with others. Compared to non-disabled men, disabled women are three times more likely to be illiterate (WHO, 2022).

1. **Situation of Risk and Humanitarian Emergencies**

Disabled people, especially disabled women and girls are disproportionately affected during humanitarian emergencies and in situation of risk. CDPF Women’s Forum calls upon governments to protect and ensure safety of disabled women and girls and prioritize their involvement, leadership and rescue period. The response strategies should include them during the planning, implementation and monitoring phases of interventions. Communication on the risks should be made in accessible formats to ensure Blind and visually impaired people, Deaf and hearing impaired and learning impaired are included. CDPF will therefore advocate that Disabled People’s Organisations (DPOs/OPDs) are meaningfully involved throughout the response period. The evacuation centres, refugee camp and internally displaced camps should be accessible for disabled women and girls. WASH programmes targeting women and girls as well as disability inclusive disaster risk reduction measures in the rescue centres should be put in place.

1. **Adequate Standard of Living and Social Protection**

The need for adequate standard of living and social security for disabled women and girls is vital. CDPF Women’s Forum calls on governments to provide and increase social protection programmes that are diversified to meet the needs of women and girls in all sectors. The social protection support should be universal. Affordable ****and accessible health insurance and social assistance should be targeted to meet the needs of disabled women and girls on an equal basis with others.

1. **Awareness Raising and Advocacy**

Disabled Women and girls with have unique and diversified needs that need to be understood by all to ensure inclusion at all levels. CDPF calls on governments to include them in international, regional, national and local fora, where they discuss their rights and issues. CDPF will advocate and lobby for funding for them to attend meetings and conferences to present their issues and rights wherever women matters are being discussed.

1. **Participation in Cultural Life, Recreation, Leisure and Sport**

Most cultural practices have discriminated against & discouraged women to participate in recreation, leisure, tourism, sport. CDPF Women’s Forum calls on governments to recognize disabled women and girls by ensuring they take part in cultural life, put in place appropriate measures to ensure that they are inclusive, accessible and that they enjoy and access cultural materials, television programmes, films, theatre, etc on an equal basis with others.

**12.Prejudice and Discrimination** against disabled women and girls is **Disabilism** that is deeply entrenched in all our cultures, reinforced by stereotypes, stigma and traditional beliefs. Focussing on Media, journalists and public relations professionals, CDPF Women Forum calls upon governments to challenge these views (Article 8 UNCRPD) amongst the general population at all levels.

**13.Gender Disaggregated Data**

Disability disaggregated data is a major issue that needs to be addressed. CDPF Women’s Forum calls upon governments to collect disability and gender disaggregated data to include the different types of impairments for planning purposes, ensuring that they are accurate and current.

**14.Climate Change Impacts on Disabled Women and Girls**

Climate change impacts disproportionately affect Disabled people. Disabled Women and girls are more susceptible to the adverse impacts of climate change. The mitigation and adaptation measures are not always responsive and inclusive of disability rights especially for women and girls. CDPF Women’s Forum calls upon government to involve disabled women and girls to be part of the Conference of Parties discussion so that their rights are entrenched in the decision taken at a high level. The water crisis and menstrual health management among disabled women and girls is a big challenge that needs to be resolved.

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