



Delegates at a two-day Commonwealth conference have outlined strategies and actions to achieve true equity and inclusion for all persons with disabilities where Commonwealth Secretary-General pledges support to **'STRONG AND UNIFIED'** disability movement. See the article in this newsletter for more details. (Photo Credit: The Commonwealth Secretariat).

**IN THIS ISSUE:**

01. WHY A COMMONWEALTH DISABILITY INCLUSION STRATEGY & ACTION PLAN?
02. COMMONWEALTH LAW MINISTERS MEETING (CLMM): ZANZIBAR, MARCH 2024
03. COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN (68CSW): NEW YORK, MARCH 2024
04. COMMONWEALTH ROUNDTABLE ON ADVANCING THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES: LONDON, 30 NOVEMBER 2023
05. UN CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE (COP28): UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, NOV/DEC 2023
06. BEING A DISABLED YOUTH DELEGATE TO COMMONWEALTH YOUTH MINISTERS MEETING: LONDON, SEPTEMBER 2023
07. CDPF MEETING WITH WORLD BANK OFFICIALS: NEW YORK, JUNE 2023
08. SITUATION REPORT 01: DISABLED AND POLITICS IN INDIA
09. SITUATION REPORT 02: THE RELEASE OF THE DISABILITY ROYAL COMMISSION FINAL REPORT (DRC FINAL REPORT): AUSTRALIA, SEPTEMBER 2023
10. CDPF NOTICES:
11. UN CHARTER BODY / TREATY BODY REVIEW OF COMMONWEALTH COUNTRIES.
12. NEWS & UPDATES FROM TREATY BODY COMMITTEES (CRPD & CEDAW)
13. RECOGNITIONS/ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
14. UPCOMING EVENTS: (I). 17COSP, NEW YORK 11-13 JUNE 2024

## WHY A COMMONWEALTH DISABILITY INCLUSION STRATEGY & ACTION PLAN?

*Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum (CDPF) have been asked to provide reasons why this Disability Inclusion Action Plan should be adopted at Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting CHOGM, October 2024.*

The CDPF has over 100 Disabled People led organisations in membership, in 49 Commonwealth countries, with a representative elected Executive Committee. We seek to gain Equality for all the estimated 450 million disabled citizens of the Commonwealth and help member countries to fully implement the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities UNCRPD \(2006\)](#).

Based on the CDPF experience of working across Commonwealth countries and within the Commonwealth, attending CHOGM, Forums, Ministerial Meetings and Commonwealth Secretariat events, we have formed the view that disabled people are poorly served in terms of access, equality, inclusion and voice. While we recognise that CHOGM communiqués in 2018 and 2022 have mentioned the UNCRPD and its implementation and challenging stigma, we have not witnessed any serious attempts to take forward the disability rights agenda across the Commonwealth.

The United Nations adopted a [Disability Inclusion Strategy](#) in 2018. The Commonwealth has no such comprehensive approach to disability. The Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum (CDPF) is proposing and lobbying for Commonwealth member states to adopt a Disability Inclusion Action Plan covering Articles and Action Points at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Samoa, October 2024.

It is 18 years since the UNCRPD was adopted at the United Nations. All but Tonga of our 56 member countries have now ratified the UNCRPD. **The implementation of the UNCRPD requires a root and branch change** in the way disability is viewed across our countries. The Convention takes to a new height the movement **from** the treatment of persons with disabilities as “objects” of charity, medical treatment and social protection **towards** viewing persons with disabilities as “subjects” with rights, who are capable of claiming those rights and making decisions for their lives based on their free and informed consent, as well as being active members of society. [The Convention gives universal recognition to the dignity of persons with disabilities.](#) **Implementation also requires countries to recognise** “that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”. (Preamble- e)

**Called a paradigm shift**, the UNCRPD requires countries to view persons with disabilities, including those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society, on an equal basis with others. (Article 2). Impairment has been with us as long as there have been human beings. It is society's response that has to change to ensure full implementation and equality for all persons with disabilities.

[Accessibility](#) is addressed on its own in Article 9 and is also a guiding principle of the Convention. This Convention marks the first time that the concept of accessibility is mentioned in an international human rights instrument. The extremely comprehensive way it is conceived in the Convention represents a large step forward in the evolution of thinking in development and disability.

If the Commonwealth at CHOGM 2024 adopts the Action Plan it will provide ways to collaborate across countries on taking forward the implementation of full rights for persons with disabilities, who have not been mentioned in the Commonwealth Charter and other declarations. The Kigali [Declaration on Child Care and Protection Reform](#), in 2022, provided ways of focusing on a forgotten area and has created new consensus across Commonwealth Ministerial meetings such as Education. The Disability Inclusion Action Plan will do likewise in 2024. The theme of CHOGM 2024 "One Resilient Common Future: Transforming our Common Wealth" looks at the core pillars of the Commonwealth through a resilience lens.

#### CHOGM 2024 aims to strengthen:

- Resilient democratic institutions upholding human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. The Action Plan provides a strong commitment and realistic proposals for achieving human rights, democratic involvement and application of the rule of law for persons with disabilities, who have largely been excluded or overlooked in these areas.
- A resilient environment to combat climate change. Vital for the future of all of us, but persons with disabilities have been shown to be between 2 and 3 times more at risk in emergency situations and will find it harder to adapt to changing climate and environmental conditions.
- Resilient economies that support recovery and prosperity. Persons with disabilities, especially women, continue to be excluded at much higher rates from employment and livelihood opportunities, creating a huge loss of GDP from every country.
- Resilient societies to empower individuals for a peaceful and productive life. Continuing stigma, discrimination and violence against persons with disabilities must be tackled systematically to achieve this pillar.

The Action Plan defines terms and draws upon the UNCRPD, while the Action Points identify a series of actions that will take the implementation of the UNCRPD in each country and across the Commonwealth as a whole, forward in a step change. It will allow for the exchange of experiences, focus on gathering disaggregated statistics, provide training and coordination of expertise and raise the profile of disability rights for all Commonwealth citizens. It has been argued that we do not need a stand-alone Disability Inclusion Action Plan and that we can prioritise mainstreaming of disability equality alongside gender and other neglected equality areas. Experience has taught the Disabled People's Movement that the Commonwealth needs a twin track approach to disability, including measures to enhance the equality of persons with disabilities in all relevant declarations, policies and documents. But because there are specific requirements of reasonable accommodation, support and accessibility that do not apply in other equality areas, we also need a specific Disability Inclusion Action Plan.

2024 is the right year for the Commonwealth to raise its profile on disability equality. As we move forward grappling with increasing financial, economic, social, political and environmental problems; if disability equality and rights for persons with disabilities are not brought centre stage then, the likelihood is they will forever remain in the margins.

Earlier drafts of the Commonwealth Disability Inclusion Action Plan took the title of Protocol and Strategy. CDPF have decided on the advice of the Commonwealth Secretariat, especially Assistant Secretary Professor LUIS FRANCESCHI, that many states are fed up with passing declarations and want Action Plans which will help them tackle the barriers faced by persons with disabilities and forward their equality. CDPF Executive has agreed to this change as we think it so important to move implementation of Disability Rights forward across the Commonwealth.

CDPF has not 'gone to the wall' on the language. CDPF favour 'disabled people' as we are disabled by the barriers in society, not our impairments. It is the social and culturally derived oppression that has to be changed by removing barriers and giving us equal rights. However, we have recognised that a number of States and many people prefer 'persons with disabilities' and so we have adopted 'persons with disabilities' in this Disability Inclusion Action Plan and when discussing the UNCRPD.

The key message that is essential is that **THE COMMONWEALTH "UPS ITS GAME" ON DISABILITY AND THE ACTION PLAN GIVES THIS POSSIBILITY.**

**RICHARD RIESER** - CDPF General Secretary. Email: [rlrieser@gmail.com](mailto:rlrieser@gmail.com)  
Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum March 2024.

## COMMONWEALTH LAW MINISTERS MEETING (CLMM) ZANZIBAR, UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA FROM 04 - 08 MARCH 2024

NOTE: Photo courtesy for this article: Ms. Sarah Kamau & Ms. Scadar Louis & The Commonwealth Secretariat.

### Introduction

The Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting (CLMM) was held in Zanzibar from 04 to 08 March 2024. Hosted by the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, the meeting was focus on the theme *'Technology and Innovation: How digitalization paves the way for the development of people-centered access to justice'*.

Using new technology for judicial affairs through digitization, protection of women and girls, strengthening access to justice for people with disabilities, climate policies, legislation, and ensuring access to justice for all is the main theme of the Meeting. During the meeting, law ministers and attorneys-



general from across the Commonwealth have discussed recent legal developments in their jurisdictions and explore responses to emerging justice issues affecting Commonwealth citizens and a wide range of issues. A key focus was to examine responsible ways to leverage technology to improve law and access to justice, especially for marginalized people.

In accordance with Sustainable Development 16.3 of ensuring access to justice for all, the Law Ministers Meeting focuses on advancing the policy directives of the Commonwealth Heads of State meetings including declarations on equal access to justice.

### CDPF Representation and Side Event

The CDPF was represented at the CMMM by CDPF Chair and Treasurer. On Monday, 04th March, the CDPF held a side event on the theme *"Practical Pathways to Strengthen Access to Justice for Persons with Disabilities"* in collaboration with the Commonwealth Human Rights Unit. The session was moderated by **Mr. STEVE ONWUASOANYA**, Acting Head of the Human Rights Unit and panellists included **Ms. SARAH KAMAU** - CDPF Chair, **Ms. SCADER LOUIS** - CDPF Treasurer, **Ms. ANGELINA ATABONG** -Sub-Director of International Cooperation, Ministry of Justice, Camaroon and **JUSTICE ILVIN MUGETA**, Judge of the High Court of Tanzania and Vice President of the Commonwealth Magistrates and Judges Association. The side event was attended by over 30 Judicial Officers, Judges and Attorney Generals from various Commonwealth countries.

During this event CDPF presented the access to justice and legal issues encountered by the disabled people, especially girls and Women with Disabilities and proposed practical pathways to strengthening access to justice for disabled people in the Commonwealth. After presentations from panellists, feedback received from Namibia, Malawi, Zambia, Seychelles and other countries had the following key takeaways.



- **Standardization:** There was a consensus on the need to develop standard guidelines for administering justice to disabled people building on what Tanzania is doing. Participants found Tanzania's existing framework particularly useful.
- **Training:** Formal training on disability and equality for justice administrators was seen as crucial. Collaboration between the CDPF, Commonwealth Secretariat, and respective countries was suggested.
- **Attitudinal Barriers:** Judge Mugeta emphasized the significant challenge of negative attitudes towards people with disabilities within the justice system.
- **Positive Examples:**
  - ✓ **Tanzania:** Legislation collection is published under the authority of the Office of the Attorney General of Tanzania. The legislation is digitised and updated by legislative drafters at the office of the Chief Parliamentary Draftsman and “Laws. Africa” legislation editors. See [digitize access](#) to judgments and legal documents.
  - ✓ **Cameroon:** Despite ratifying the UNCRPD late (2023), Cameroon is already taking strides towards access to justice for all. These initiatives include installing ramps in new courthouses, training magistrates, and assigning designated officers for disability-related cases.

The Commonwealth Human Rights Unit covered the event on [Twitter](#).

## CDPF Participation and Intervention

The agenda included a discussion paper on **“Disability Access to Justice”** under Strategic Legal Issues and National Progress Reports. However, time constraints prevented its review.

During a side event on **“Innovating for Justice”**, CDPF representative has made interventions and advocated for improved access to justice for disabled people.

The Namibian Justice Minister, while supportive of the action plan, expressed concern about the disability movement's effectiveness in Namibia. She cited a misinterpretation of **“Nothing about us without us”** suggesting a lack of recognition for non-disabled advocacy efforts.

Lobbied to sensitise delegates who were present the CLMM, especially Justice Ministers and Attorney Generals including the Commonwealth Secretary-General about the “**Commonwealth Disability Inclusion Strategy & Action Plan**” (CDIS&AP) expected to be adopted during the upcoming CHOGM in Samoa.

Commonwealth Foundation representative commended the CDPF for its commitment and assured their support for the Commonwealth Disability Inclusion Strategy & Action Plan and to have collaboration in Samoa during the CHOGM.



### Personal Experience (Barriers /Challenges)

The arrival/transit arrangements in Zanzibar was marred by significant accessibility and/or reasonable accommodation issues. My wheelchair was misplaced during transit, and transportation arrangements were not prepared to meet my minimum expected needs. Additionally, assistance at the Nairobi airport was quite in-dignifying as I had to be carried down flight stairs on an aisle wheelchair, despite clear communication from CDPF regarding my requirements were submitted well in advance. However, no plans were put in place to ensure smooth travel, transit and partition for CLMM as a delegate.

During the return journey also I experienced difficulties. As VIPs, check-in was handled by the Zanzibar ground handling team, our (myself and my assistant) luggage went missing. I got my bag on Monday this week.

#### Opening Ceremony Absence:

Due to communication lapses regarding transportation arrangements, I was unable to attend the opening ceremony on Monday evening. I received a written apology from the organisers and verbal apologies from the Deputy Secretary-General and Director of Event Planning. Apology accepted but not enough. I did not understand why and how this exclusion happens. THIS SHOULD NOT REPEAT.

Despite the initial difficulties, I was able to participate in other CLMM program activities till Thursday and took time to have fun!

*"Discussions at the Commonwealth Law Ministers Meetings mark a positive step towards equal access to justice. Let's translate these commitments into concrete action for a more inclusive future by adopting and actively support implementation of the Commonwealth Disability Inclusion Action Plan".*

**SCADER LOUIS** - CDPF Tresurere &  
Federation of Disability Organisations in Malawi

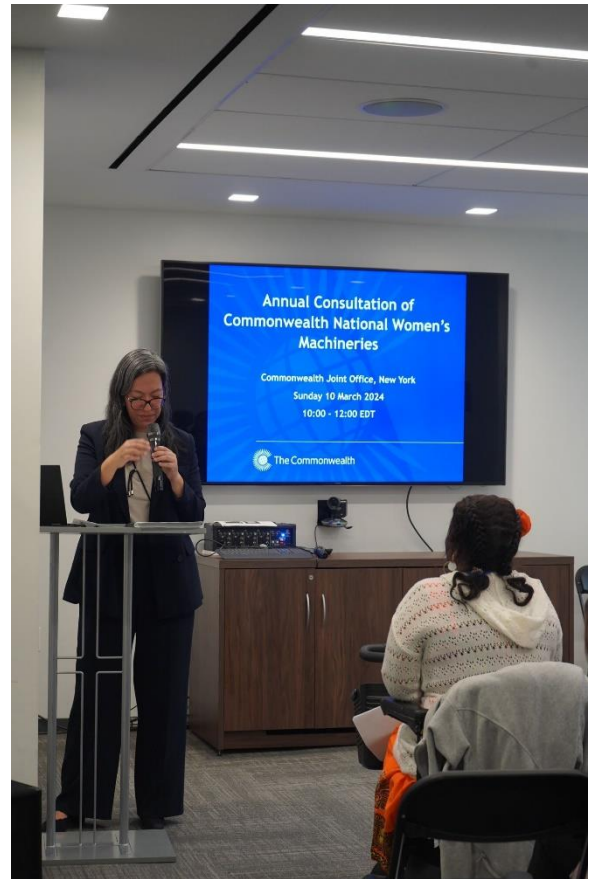


## COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN (68CSW): New York, 11 -22 March 2024

NOTE: Photo courtesy for this article: Ms. Sarah Kamau & The Commonwealth Secretariat.

The Commission on the Status of Women (68CSW) was held in New York from the 11<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2024. The conference brought together representatives of Commonwealth member states from all regions of the world to engage and discuss the Gender Agenda. The Priority Theme for the CSW68 was *“Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective”*. The Review theme was *“Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls”*.

The Commonwealth Secretariat, Gender Section, headed by **MS. JENNIFER** held an *“Annual Consultation of Commonwealth National Women’s Machinery Consultation”*, at the **Commonwealth Joint Office** in New York followed by the **First Commonwealth Women’s Forum** event on Women’s Economic Empowerment.



Workshop headed by Ms. Jennifer, Commonwealth Secretariat addressing the audience during the Consultation.

During the side event, Commonwealth Disabled Peoples Forum (CDPF) was given a chance to present on Disability Inclusion and to give strategies on how the achievement of the actualization of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and Sustainable Development Goals (SGDs) could be achieved given the short time remaining to its count down. The Disability Inclusion agenda is one of outcomes of the 13th **Women Affairs Women’s Meeting** (13WAMM) held in Nassau, Bahamas with the theme *“Equality towards a Common Future”*.

Out of the 2.5 billion people in the 56 Commonwealth, 1.3 billion, who comprise nearly 16 per cent of the global population experience a significant disability and the number is increasing. Not only are women and girls disproportionately represented, with the disability prevalence rate of approximately 19 per cent versus 12 per cent for men. But they also face multiple barriers that may result in a lower economic and social status, increased risk of gender based violence and abuse, including sexual violence, gender based discriminatory practices, limited access to education, health services, including sexual and reproductive health services, information, information, service, access to justice, as well as civic and political participation, and the emerging climate change impacts.





CDPF Chair Ms. Sarah Kamau addressing an audience during 68CSW side event on the status of Woman & Girls with Disabilities. (Photo Credit: Ms. Sarah Kamau and the Commonwealth Secretariat).

These barriers exacerbate the full realization of the rights of all women and girls with disabilities. The need for meaningful inclusion of disabled people and their representative organizations and more so, women and girls with disabilities for gender equality highlighting the importance of the collection of disaggregated data and adoption of the Disability Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan to fast track the actualization of the CRPD and SDGs is key.

The CDPF Chair, highlighted on disability rights on Education, Work and Employment – Economic Empowerment, Accessibility, Stigma and Discrimination, Political participation, Cross cutting issues on Gender and Age (inter-sectionality), Disaggregated Data by Gender and Disability, Climate Change, move beyond gender equality to Gender Equity, and the call for the adoption of the ***Commonwealth Disability Inclusion Strategy and Action*** (CDISA) during CHOGM 2024.

CDPF will continue to be the unified voice and amplify the voice of disabled people across the commonwealth member states. CDPF is grateful for being involved by the Commonwealth Secretariat and will continue to give its technical support on disabilities rights across board.

**SARAH KAMAU** - CDPF Chairperson & United Disabled Persons - Kenya

## COMMONWEALTH ROUNDTABLE ON ADVANCING THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES: 30 NOVEMBER 2023, LONDON

(The Commonwealth Roundtable on Advancing the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, held from 30<sup>th</sup> of November to 1<sup>st</sup> of December 2023, was a pivotal event commemorating the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. With the overarching international theme of “*United in action to rescue and achieve the SDGs for, with, and by persons with disabilities*”, this roundtable brought together key stakeholders, policymakers, advocates, and individuals directly affected by disabilities from across the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth Round Table celebrating International Disabled Peoples Day was attended by 90 disabled people from across the Commonwealth mainly online and in person at Marlborough House where we were joined by representatives of the High Commission of South Africa, Kenya and New Zealand who gave an opening address. New Zealand High Commissioner Hon Phil Goff gave some very encouraging remarks. New Zealand has recently set up [WHAIKAHA- MINISTRY OF DISABLED PEOPLE](#). The leadership team of WHAIKAHA is led by Chief Executive PAULA TESORIERO, a disabled person. The Secretary General of the Commonwealth sent a very supportive recorded message, as [PATRICIA SCOTLAND](#) is leading the Commonwealth delegation to COP28.

[SARAH KAMAU, CDPF Chair](#), co-chaired the Roundtable from Marlborough House in London with LAYNE ROBINSON of Com Sec and in the afternoon with the Commonwealth Human Rights Unit. The morning session heard contributions from a number of CDPF Executive on how things were going for disabled people across the Commonwealth. We had thoughtful contributions from two CDPF Patrons, who are members of the UNCRPD Committee, DR. SAMUEL KABUE (Kenya) and Senator DR. FLOYD MORRIS from Jamaica. We heard [from SCADER LOUIS of Malawi](#) (CDPF Treasurer) on the experience of attending the UNCRPD Committee in Geneva. [SOOVAN SHARMA](#) from Mauritius, Chair CDPF Climate and emergencies sub-committee who is currently attending COP28 on CDPFs behalf. [DR. EMILE GOUWS](#), CDPF Executive member for underrepresented groups and a neurodiversity self-advocate addressed the issues of getting hard to reach disabled people into the movement. [KIHEMBO WILBERT from Uganda](#), CDPF Youth Representative sent a strong message both on behalf of all disabled youth to be leaders now not just in the future and on behalf of the millions who are non-verbal.

DR. SRUTI MOHAPATRA our Vic Chair from India, gave a great presentation on the state of play in India and [KERRYANN IFILL](#) our other Vice Chair from Barbados in the Caribbean, gave a short presentation. [GAUDENCE MUSHIMIYIMANA](#), CDPF Women’s Rep and convenor of the Women’s Forum explained that with the help of the Women’s Section of Com Sec we had held a number of Women’s Forums and sent reps to New York in March and the Commonwealth Ministers Meeting on Women’s Affairs in the Bahamas in August. This led to the inclusion of a number of important policy points in the declaration.

DR. RICHARD RIESER, OBE our General Secretary raised important points throughout the day and the next morning on the way forward arguing strongly for a standalone DISABILITY INCLUSION PROTOCOL to go to CHOGM.

Mainstreaming as favoured by Com Sec will not work. We need a twin track approach which both allows for the inclusion of disability equality generally and providing for the specific impairment based reasonable accommodations, support and aids and appliances we require.

Richards message is contained in his [International Disabled People's Day message](#). Our Draft Disability Inclusion Protocol/Strategy can be found at <https://commonwealthdpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/THE-COMMONWEALTH-DISABILITY-INCLUSION-PROTOCOL-draft-1-2-3.docx>

We will not go to the wall on the language. CDPF favour DISABLED PEOPLE as we are disabled by the barriers in society, not our impairments. There have been impairments as long as humans have existed. It is the social and culturally derived oppression that has to change by removing barriers and giving us equal rights. But we recognise many people prefer persons with disabilities and so we suggest these words are used inter changeably in the Protocol/Strategy. What is essential is that the Commonwealth UPS ITS GAME on disability and a Protocol/Strategy gives this possibility.

**Most importantly, start discussions with your Government to win their support for this initiative being adopted by the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in October 2024 in Samoa.**

The roundtable on 30<sup>th</sup> November was attended by a number of activists from the UK Disabled People's Movement and allies from the UK Government FCDO, who from next year will help to fund CDPF and last year produced a PROGRESSIVE DISABILITY INCLUSION AND RIGHTS STRATEGY 2022-2030.

Commonwealth Parliamentary Association who have a vibrant [Network of Parliamentarians with Disabilities](#). Encourage Parliamentarians who are disabled people to be active in this Network and encourage them to support our struggle for full implementation of the UNCRPD and equal rights for disabled people in their country.

**RICHARD RIESER - CDPF General Secretary.**

The Commonwealth Secretariat Human Rights Unit and Social Policy Development Section has compiled a [CONFERENCE REPORT](#) summarising the deliberations discussed during the Commonwealth Roundtable on Advancing the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which was held on Thursday, 30 November - 01 December 2023 at Marlborough House, London, UK. Report consist of following Annexes..

**ANNEX I: Programme: Commonwealth Roundtable on Advancing the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

**ANNEX II: Secretary General's remarks on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities**

**ANNEX III: Recommendations**

**ANNEX IV: The Commonwealth Disability Inclusion Protocol**

Draft as of 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2023r 2023 produced by CDPF for Discussion.

## UNITED NATIONS CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE (COP28)

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, 30 November – 12 December 2023

*(SOOVAN SHARMA DOOKHOO, CDPF Executive Officer from Mauritius & CDPF Climate Subcommittee Chair, had the opportunity to represent CDPF at the 28th Conference of Parties in UAE)*

### REPORT ON INTERVENTION ON INCLUSIVE CLIMATE ACTION FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES DURING COP 28- DECEMBER 2023 IN UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

#### Introduction:

At COP28 in Dubai, CDPF interventions focused on advocating for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction efforts. Grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) Article 11, the presentation highlighted the unique vulnerabilities faced by this community in emergencies. The report outlined key strategies to align COP28 policies with the UNCRPD's principles of non-discrimination, full participation, accessibility, and equality.

#### Key Recommendations:

##### I. Legal Framework and Obligations:

- Encourage countries to ratify and implement the UNCRPD, integrating its principles into disaster risk reduction and emergency response policies.
- Ensure equal access to information for persons with disabilities, employing accessible formats for early warnings and evacuation instructions.

##### II. Inclusive Disaster Preparedness and Response:

- Promote the development of inclusive infrastructure for safe evacuation, sheltering, and transportation.
- Invest in training programs for emergency responders, focusing on disability-inclusive disaster response.

##### III. Data Collection and Monitoring:

- Collect disaggregated data on disability for risk assessments, surveys, and reporting.
- Establish mechanisms for regular reporting on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in disaster management efforts.

##### IV. Ensuring Accessibility and Non-Discrimination:

- Promote universal design principles for accessible infrastructure, communication, and services.
- Encourage the provision of reasonable accommodations for full participation in disaster preparedness and response.

##### V. Participation and Consultation:

- Ensure active involvement of persons with disabilities in decision-making processes related to climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction.

## VI. Financing and Resource Allocation:

- Allocate dedicated funding for disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation programs.
- Foster collaborations between governments, civil society, and disabled persons organizations to maximize resources.
- Collaborations with Rotary International:

In addition, had a successful discussion with Rotary International Secretary to explore potential collaborations aimed to leverage Rotary's global network for advancing disability-inclusive climate action.

## Challenges Faced:

Notably, the absence of a blue pass limited interactions and discussions. Despite this, the intervention highlighted the urgency of prioritizing the integration of UNCRPD Article 11 principles into climate action policies for a more equitable and resilient future.

## Conclusion:

COP 28 had the opportunity to play a pivotal role in advancing disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation. The recommendations outlined in this report underscore the importance of prioritizing the rights, dignity, and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of calamities, risks, and emergencies.

Media: [Soovan speak from COP 28](#)

**SOOVAN SHARMA DOOKHOO** - CDPF Executive Officer & Federation of Disabled People's Organisations Mauritius (FDPOM)

## BEING A DISABLED YOUTH DELEGATE TO COMMONWEALTH YOUTH MINISTERS MEETING

LONDON, SEPTEMBER 2023

*(SAISTA PARWIN, from India, had the opportunity to represent Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum (CDPF) as the Youth Representative at the 13th Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting)*

It was a privilege, to attend the Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting (13CYMM) held in London but a disappointment realising that 1.3 billion of the worldwide population is a disabled person and I am the one and only representative who attended the meeting from my country that is a disabled person (pun intended). I felt every disabled person present probably felt some kind of desire to take action – it really was a call to action.

Historically, the fight for the rights of disabled people has taken various forms, ranging from peaceful resistance to protest, and coalesced around leaders whose words and deeds provide a call to activism. Different movements have resonated across Commonwealth countries and globally, particularly among activists from the Commonwealth countries, who leverage the power of social media and our interconnected lives to raise awareness of our campaigns. These campaigns address a range of issues, from accessibility to reasonable accommodations, from the fight for mainstream coverage to basic access to facilitate such as washrooms in the conferences etc. - all basic human rights that demand attention.

Unfortunately, the Commonwealth Secretary General did not adopt this inclusive approach, which reflects the harsh reality we are all living in. There is a notable decline in Disability Rights campaigns, with disability activists often being overshadowed by political and geopolitical considerations. Furthermore, historical, cultural, and geographical factors are sometimes used to silence calls for protecting the rights of disabled people who are most marginalised. Tactics such as 'WHATABOUTISM' and comparisons to similar or worse oppression are employed, whether out of genuine ignorance or as a calculated move, to suggest that calls for equal representation of disabled people's human rights are unnecessary or unjustified.

Over five impactful days, the conference hosted a series of engaging plenary sessions, each contributing a unique perspective to the exploration of varied human rights issues in the Commonwealth and the state party. Also find the declaration Report on 10th Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting, Marlborough House | London, United Kingdom 11-15 September 2023.

### SAISTA'S EVENT DIARY:

#### Monday, 11 September 2023: Roundtable meeting (with Stakeholders)

Foreign Minister JALIL ABBAS JILANI chaired the 10th Commonwealth Youth Ministers' Meeting (CYMM) in London from 12-15 September 2023. This was the first time in 30 years that Pakistan chaired a Commonwealth event. Youth Ministers from more than 45 Commonwealth states participated in the meeting, which was held as part of the Commonwealth's commemoration of 2023 as the "YEAR OF YOUTH". Chairing the CYMM, the Foreign Minister emphasised the Commonwealth's role in charting youth engagement in

the global sustainable development agenda. He added that youth comprised 60 percent of the Commonwealth's population, which was our biggest asset.

### **I had three interventions:**

1. When we are talking about inclusivity and reasonable accommodation, where is the sign language interpreter? Are we just talking about inclusivity, but when it comes to actual implementation, I see little action in the ground realities?
2. When we talk about education, what steps has a responsible International Organisation taken to ensure inclusive education for all, especially for Disabled children with special educational needs coming from the economically marginalised sections of the society?
3. I hear the word 'inclusion' from every other esteemed speaker, which is good and I am happy about it. But wait, let me ask you something. I will be very obliged if you could answer: When we are talking about inclusion repeatedly, almost from every other speaker/panellist, but we are sitting in one of the Western countries known to be a developed nation, in the very building where we are sitting; that building itself is not wheelchair accessible, and the washrooms are not friendly enough if my colleague wishes to attend this whole session.

Tuesday, 12 September 2023: Ministerial Policy Discussion on Sub-theme 2: Education

### **Same questions on inclusion and education to the minister of Ghana and to the ministers of Kenya:**

1. What steps have they have taken in their respective government to ensure that Disabled children have access to primary education?
2. How to ensure primary education, serves as a basic foundation and steppingstone, to empower Disabled people economically? Because recognising the correlation between education and economics is imperative to leverage education as the tool to bring and include Disabled people into the mainstream society.
3. I received a few cross questions during the discussion and a few afterwards when networking.

Wednesday, 13 September 2023: Ministerial Policy Discussion on Sub-theme 4

### **My intervention and questions to the panel:**

1. Diversity is an important issue for any modern state/business, but it's not enough to simply hire people of different nationalities, races, genders, and sexual orientations or categorise Disabled persons, whatever you want to name us although we prefer the word Disabled people. Everyone needs to feel welcomed, safe and free to be themselves in the workplace. If you focus on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in your state, your business's culture and bottom line will benefit.
2. Although many states are moving toward more inclusion and diversity, isn't there still much progress to be made?
3. As a State what steps have you taken to ensure that diversity is maintained?

### **Business – the breakout session**

Questions to Pakistan's ex-Sports and Youth Minister:

1. Under which policy or law is there no representation politically, especially from the most vulnerable and marginalised community: that is Disabled persons since independence of Pakistan in 1947. Why is there no law explicitly for the persons with disability or per se reservation for the Disabled youth?
2. When you are talking so much about youth concerns and when the state is so powerful, what is stopping you from doing so? Why is there a lack of political will? I appreciate your interest. I as a youth representative myself was impressed but when it come to a Disabled youth why is there a big silence?

Thursday, 14 September 2023

The rest of the time on Thursday I spent networking and meeting with the Commonwealth Human Rights Unit. Overall, I was not impressed and realised how far we have to go to get disability equality in the Commonwealth, but this only increased my motivation to achieve this.

**SAISTA PARWIN** - CDPF Executive Officer / Youth Representative & Swabhiman - India)

#### **CDPF MEETING WITH WORLD BANK OFFICIALS: NEW YORK, JUNE 2023**

Commonwealth Disabled Peoples Forum (CDPF) senior officers during the COSP 16 held a meeting with the World Bank team. CDPF's objective of the meeting was on how to resource mobilize from the World Bank in order to support its activities. The meeting was attended by the CDPF General Secretary, Chair, Vice Chair and MS CHARLOTTE MCCLAIN-NHLAPO, World Bank Global Disability Advisor – Social, Urban, Rural and Resilience together with her team.

Discussion around funding established that World Bank can at the moment engage with the National Councils of Disabled People in their respective countries and World Bank is mandated only to engage with individual countries and respective organizations through their National Disability Councils (NDC). Most of the umbrella representative bodies work closely with their Governments and the NDC's that are state agencies of the ministries dealing with disability rights. CDPF is calling upon Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs) and encouraging them to engage with respective NDC's in order to mobilize from World Bank funds.

The contact for World Bank is 1818 H Street NW – MC 4-414-Washington, DC 20433 USA.  
Email: [cmccain-nhlapo@worldbank.org](mailto:cmccain-nhlapo@worldbank.org) Twitter:mcnhlapo

**SARAH KAMAU** - CDPF Chairperson & United Disabled Persons - Kenya

#### **SITUATION RFEPORT 01: DISABLED AND POLITICS IN INDIA**



With a population of over 1.4 billion people and close to 970 million voters, India's general election is the world's biggest democratic exercise. The 6-week-long general election will start on April 19 and results will be announced on June 4. The voters, who comprise over 10% of the world's population, will elect 543 members for the lower house of Parliament for a five-year term. The polls will be held in seven phases and ballots cast at more than a million polling stations. Each phase will last a single day with several constituencies across multiple states voting that day. The **ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA** (ECI), an autonomous constitutional authority, will conduct the voting process. The ECI has a staff capacity including more than 300 full-time officials who work out of its New Delhi headquarters. They work in collaboration with the local administrations of each state, assigning electoral work to five million government officials. The competition between the parties is for 543 of the 545 seats in India's lower house of parliament, **LOK SABHA**. The remaining two seats are held for the Anglo-Indian community, which traces part of its ancestry to Europeans who intermarried with Indians in the colonial era. India's president nominates these members. India has a first-past-the-post multiparty electoral system in which the candidate who receives the most votes wins. To secure a majority, a party or coalition must breach the mark of 272 seats. While voters in the United States and elsewhere use paper ballots, India uses electronic voting machines.

The right to political participation, including of persons with disabilities, is firmly grounded in international law, enshrined in the UNCRPD, Constitution of India, Election Rules and Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016. Article 324 of the Constitution provides for the Election Commission, its powers and functions for maintenance of the Electoral Roll and conduct of elections in a free and fair manner. Article 325 provides that no person shall be ineligible for inclusion in the electoral roll on the grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or anyone of these. Article 326 provides for the **UNIVERSAL ADULT SUFFRAGE** to be the basis of elections. The concerned provisions of the Constitution and the law that flows there from cast an obligation on the Election Commission of India (ECI) for conduct of free, fair and inclusive elections based on adult suffrage. Provisions under Rule 49N of the ECI Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, guidelines, and Supreme Court orders directly address the issue of assistance to persons with disabilities. Provisions under Rule 49N of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, ECI guidelines, and Supreme Court orders directly address the issue of assistance to persons with disabilities. Under Rule 49N, if owing to blindness or other physical infirmities an elector is unable to recognise the symbol on the EVM or unable to record vote by pressing the appropriate button thereon, the presiding officer shall permit the elector to take with him a companion of not less than eighteen years of age to the voting compartment for recording the vote on his behalf and in accordance with his wishes. In UNCRPD Article 21 highlights Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information and Article 29 on Participation in political and public life. In RPwD Act 2016, Section 11 of Chapter II (Rights and Entitlements), states *"The Election Commission of India and the State Election Commissions shall ensure that all polling stations are accessible to persons with disabilities and all materials related to the electoral process are easily understandable by and accessible to them"*.

Despite India's significant strides in disability rights, the political inclusion of disabled people remains a challenge. With over 10 million registered voters, people with disabilities represent a considerable electoral force in the 2024 polls. Yet, their participation in the political process is minuscule. While political parties appeal to other marginalised groups, the disability sector has been largely left out. Though the disability rights movement over the past two decades has brought some change, the community still faces routine rights violations. Over the past decade, a few people with disabilities have contested as independents or as candidates of smaller parties, but not many have won. At Panchayat level, some candidates with disabilities have made it, mainly as independent candidates.

It's only in the 2000s, with the Supreme Court's orders in the Disabled Rights Group vs. Union of India case, that the ECI started making voting booths accessible. With **NATIONAL DISABILITY NETWORK** (NDN), and **NCPEDP NEW DELHI** (led by late Javed Abidi), **SWABHIMAN** (led by Dr. Sruti Mohapatra) has been advocating for voting and participation rights of the disabled in India and in Odisha too. In 2009 and 2014 we had limited success but 2018 Voters Day theme being declared as Accessible Elections by ECI, 2019 was a success for citizens with disabilities.

**ECI's Broad Policy Framework** ECI's broad policy framework on Accessible Elections emanates from the guiding principles and the mandate as discussed above. Further, its Strategic Plan for 2016-25 spells out long term the strategic interventions and the current focus of in a continued endeavour for enhancement of inclusion of PwDs as an integral part of its election management including voter education. Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) broad areas of coverage are as below:

- An officer well versed with provisions of facilities for PwDs, shall be designated for each of the Assembly Constituencies.
- Wide publicity through various modes shall be ensured. Basic publicity material shall be prepared with simple language, sign language, Braille.
- Special/Mobile camps should be organized to educate and motivate PwDs
- Efforts should be made to prepare volunteers from NCC, NSS, NYK etc to motivate and create awareness among PwDs.
- Publicity regarding services offered by CSC, MSKs should be enhanced.
- Efforts shall be made to have renowned PwDs as District Ambassadors and District, State icons.

**Lok Sabha Elections 2014** During the Lok Sabha Election 2014, ECI initiated several measures that made registration process voter-friendly.

- Online registration & name search facility in Electoral Roll on ECI's & CEOs' website.
- SMS based services for searching name and polling booth.
- Information on election laws, guidelines and details regarding ROs, AROs, BLOs on CEOs' website.
- Voter Facilitation Centers (VFCs) for E-Roll issues and EPIC.
- Forms 6, 7, 8 & 8A at prominent places including banks, post offices, colleges, universities & schools.
- Nation-wide Special registration camps held in weekly haats, during festivals and through mobile vans to facilitate voters for checking their details on the voters' list. ECI has implemented several measures to ensure basic facilities at the polling stations making them conducive for PwDs to cast their vote. Some of them are as below:
- Braille signage on the Ballot Unit of EVM
- Construction of ramps – temporary installed where permanent ramps had not been provided.

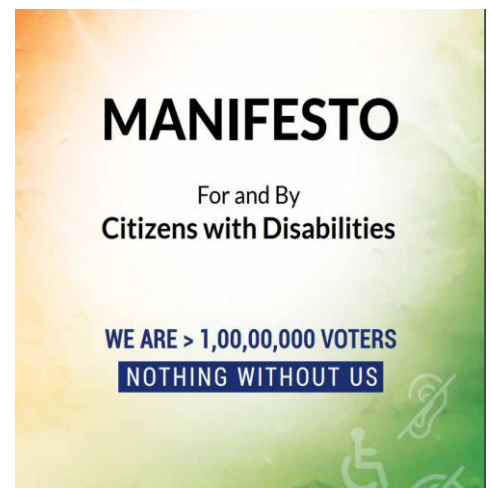
- Entering polling stations without waiting in the queue.
- Facility granted to take wheel chairs inside polling stations.
- Polling personnel briefed about the International Conference on 'Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) in Electoral Processes' 21 provisions of Rule 49 N of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, for permitting a companion to accompany a blind/infirm elector.
- Electors with speech & hearing impairment were given special care as in the case of other disabled persons.
- Poll personnel were trained & sensitized regarding special need of PwDs.

Special Directions of the Commission were given for providing adequate facilities to the PwDs. Provided Basic Minimum Facilities (BMF) at the Polling Station, such as

- location of polling stations preferably at the ground floor in good quality buildings with separate entrance and exit
- drinking water, toilets,
- provision of first aid,
- adequate space with ventilation, sufficient lighting & amenities like chairs, benches & covered shelter



Voter information and Awareness Wide publicity to all available facilities by means of print and electronic media including social media has been given besides holding meetings with political parties and candidates. Initiatives in the Year 2018, during the year, the Commission has launched the theme 'Accessible Elections' on the eve of the Nationals' Day 2018. An international seminar has been organized on 'Inclusion of the Persons with Disabilities in the Electoral Processes'. However, in 2019 despite elaborate arrangements, in many booths across the state, voters with disability faced multiple barriers.



Accessibility features for voters with disabilities, including Braille ballot paper, disabled-friendly toilets and ramps were missing at several polling booths across the country during the Lok Sabha polls. One of the most important steps that ensure accessibility across the country is training and sensitizing volunteers or booth level officers.

Highlighting these, in 2024 the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP) along with National Disability Network (NDN) has embarked on a new campaign 'Disabled People in Politics' ahead of polls with an aim to work towards political inclusion. Apart from two national consultations, 9 regional consultations have been held across India. Various steps are being taken:

- Highlighting the huge number of voters with disabilities
- How the vote of citizens with disabilities matter

- Release of a Manifesto by Citizens with Disabilities. NCPEDP, NDN, NCRPD, 15000 people and 600 organisations worked in developing the Manifesto for & by Citizens with Disabilities
- Presentation of the manifesto Political parties and leaders of political parties
- Media meets
- Small group discussions

## Positive Responses from Political Parties

By incorporating 9 out of 14 demands from the Disability Manifesto for and by the People with Disabilities, @cpimspeak's manifesto (Communist Party of India, CPIM) makes a significant step towards empowerment and inclusion. This demonstrates the party's a commitment to mainstreaming disability discourse and policymaking, to create a more inclusive society.



The INC (Indian National Congress) Party's announcement in their manifesto to expanding Articles 15 and 16 of the Constitution to include protection against discrimination based on disability is not just a policy announcement; it's a seismic shift in how our society perceives and includes persons with disabilities. *“For too long, we've been relegated to the sidelines, seen as mere beneficiaries of welfare programs rather than as active contributors to the nation's progress. But with this bold step, the Congress Party acknowledges our inherent dignity and rights as equal citizens”,* said Arman Ali, Executive Director NCPEDP and Convenor NDN. He further stated *“By recognizing disability alongside other grounds of discrimination, such as race or gender, Congress is sending a powerful message: Disability rights are human rights, and they must be enshrined in our constitutional framework”.*

## 2024 Initiatives by the ECI for PwDs

The Commission has taken various interventions from time to time to facilitate the elections for persons with disabilities. Some of the initiatives taken are:-

- Mapping of all the Persons with Disabilities polling station wise
- All Polling Stations are to be situated on the ground floor
- PwD friendly facilities under AMF
- Separate Queue for PwDs
- Optional home voting facility
- Voter EPICS/Slips in Braille



- Braille Features on EVMs
- Wheel Chairs and Ramps with Proper Gradient
- Free Transport facility with Pick and Drop Facility

## In Conclusion

The world is inclining towards inclusive development of all communities, but unfortunately, the expected levels of inclusiveness for the disabled community have not been achieved yet. Political representation of the disabled in the Parliament, State assemblies and Panchayats will be a very big step towards achieving inclusive development and will encourage disabled community in rural areas to develop the required infrastructure for themselves to empower them. The disabled community in the country is gradually making it to the forefront in almost all aspects of life. Inclusive policies go a long way in enabling the disabled community and providing them with equal opportunities to make use of their rights, attain their strengths and contribute to a nation's growth. A quota for the Persons with Disabilities for contesting in the Lok Sabha, state elections and in elections at the local level will be a significant progressive step in the journey towards inclusiveness.

**Para Archer SHEETAL DEVI Becomes THE NATIONAL ICON For DISABLED OF ECI**

UTKARSH  
+91-9829213213  
<https://utkarsh.com/>  
support@utkarsh.com



**SRUTI MOHAPATRA - CDPF Vice Chairperson & Swabhimani, Odisha, India.**

## SITUATION REPORT 02: THE RELEASE OF THE DISABILITY ROYAL COMMISSION FINAL REPORT (DRC FINAL REPORT): AUSTRALIA, SEPTEMBER 2023

### THE DISABILITY ROYAL COMMISSION

The [DISABILITY ROYAL COMMISSIONS](#) - Australia was established in April 2019 in response to community concern about widespread reports of violence against, and the neglect, abuse and exploitation of, people with disability. These incidents might have happened recently or a long time ago. The Disability Royal Commission investigated:

- Preventing and better protecting people with disability from experiencing violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation
- Achieving best practice in reporting, investigating and responding to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability
- Promoting a more inclusive society that supports people with disability to be independent and live free from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.

### FINAL REPORT

The Royal Commission has made 222 recommendations on how to improve laws, policies, structures and practices to ensure a more inclusive and just society that supports the independence of people with disability and their right to live free from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. The [FINAL REPORT](#) consists of 12 Volumes plus an additional introductory volume, which includes the Chair's foreword, our vision for an inclusive Australia, an executive summary and the full list of recommendations. All volumes of the Final Report are available in various accessible formats. Click on a volume below to view and download these formats.

01. A [brief guide to the Final Report](#)
02. Final Report - [Executive Summary](#), Our vision for an Inclusive Australia and Recommendations
03. Final Report - [Volume 1](#), Voices of people with disability
04. Final Report - [Volume 2](#), About the Royal Commission
05. Final Report - [Volume 3](#), Nature and extent of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation
06. Final Report - [Volume 4](#), Realising the human rights of people with disability
07. Final Report - [Volume 5](#), Governing for inclusion
08. Final Report - [Volume 6](#), Enabling autonomy and access
09. Final Report - [Volume 7](#), Inclusive education, employment and housing
10. Final Report - [Volume 8](#), Criminal justice and people with disability
11. Final Report - [Volume 9](#), First Nations people with disability
12. Final Report - [Volume 10](#), Disability services
13. Final Report - [Volume 11](#), Independent oversight and complaint mechanisms
14. Final Report - [Volume 12](#), Beyond the Royal Commission

The release of the Disability Royal Commission (DRC) Report was a watershed moment for People with Disability Australia, individually and for a wider community. But the work is only just beginning to ensure the Royal Commission delivers on what it sets out: genuine change and set the agenda for change and the way forward for shaping a more inclusive community for disabled people. People with Disability Australia (PWDA) is committed to consulting with members and working alongside Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) as we move into the next phase of advocating for our calls for change to be heard.

### About People with Disability Australia (PWDA)

People with Disability Australia (PWDA) is a national disability rights, advocacy and representative organisation that is made up of, led and governed by people with disability. We have a [VISION](#) of a socially just, accessible and inclusive community, in which the human rights, belonging, contribution, potential and diversity of all people with disability are recognised, respected and celebrated with pride.

Our members, people with disability and organisations made up of people with disability, are actively involved in PWDA, electing a [BOARD](#) of people with disability every year. Many of [OUR STAFF](#) are also people with disability. [FOUNDED IN 1981](#), the International Year of Disabled Persons, People with Disability Australia provides people with disability with a voice of our own. We have a cross-disability focus representing the interests of people with all kinds of disability. We are a non-profit, non-government organisation. We are a founding member of [DISABLED PEOPLE'S ORGANISATIONS AUSTRALIA](#).

Disability supports and services are a human right that should be protected and accessible to all Australians with disability, and the NDIS is a vital safety net that should protect all Australians if, and when they need it. PWDA is committed to ensuring the response to the report improves choice and control, and access to support for disabled people when, how, and where they need it, regardless of their location or disability.

On behalf of the PWDA Board I also want to acknowledge that PWDA remains committed to walking alongside the First Peoples of this land on the path to reconciliation and self-determination. Now is a time for deep reflection for our country and we stand ready to offer support when the First Nations Australians who supported the Voice referendum, including colleagues at First Nations Disability Network (FPDN), decide on what comes next.

**NICOLE LEE** - President - People with Disability Australia (PWDA)

**CPDF NOTICES:**





The Commonwealth

THE YEAR OF  
**YOUTH**  
— 2023/24 —

## Promoting the Commonwealth's Youth-led Non-communicable disease (NCD) Guiding Framework through Multisectoral Collaboration

Thursday 25 April 2024 1400–1530 (BST)

To address the rising burden of non-communicable diseases, the Commonwealth Secretariat is organising a webinar which will bring together Commonwealth member countries, Commonwealth accredited organisations and the Commonwealth youth networks on a common platform to explore ways of collaboratively working together to promote and implement the Commonwealth Youth-led NCD Guiding Framework.

### Join us to:

- Know more about the Commonwealth Youth-led NCD Guiding Framework.
- Discuss ways of accelerating the implementation of the youth led NCD guiding framework in Commonwealth member countries.
- Explore how we can leverage multisectoral collaboration and the potential of Commonwealth youths in the implementation of the framework.

### Speakers:

**Rt Hon. Patricia Scotland KC**  
Secretary-General of the Commonwealth

**Layne Robinson**  
Head, Social Policy Development,  
Commonwealth Secretariat

**Dr Janneth Mghamba**  
Health Adviser, Commonwealth Secretariat

**Prof Monika Arora**  
President of NCD Alliance (2023-25)

**Prof Peter Scott**  
Commonwealth of Learning

**Prof Eugene Sobngwi**  
Ministry of Public Health, Cameroon

**Prof Vajira Dissanayake**  
Commonwealth Health Professionals and  
Partners Alliance

**David N Jones**  
Commonwealth Organisation for Social Work

**Lucy Fagan**  
Commonwealth Youth Health Network

**Ishu Kataria**  
WHO Youth Council

### Registration Link:

<https://bit.ly/4ajmMei>

## UN CHARTER BODY / TREATY BODY REVIEW OF COMMONWEALTH COUNTRIES

### CRPD COMMITTEE STATE PARTY REVIEWS OF COMMONWEALTH COUNTRIES

COUNTRY	STATE PARTY REPORT DUE/SUBMITTED	REVIEW DATE	SESSION
Canada	11-Apr-20 / 07-Nov-20	6-Mar-25	32 Session
Cyprus	27-Jul-21/26-Jul-22	Aug-27	37 Session
Ghana	5-Jun-18	Aug-24	31 Session
Kiribati	16-Oct-23	Aug-25	33 Session
Maldives	14-Apr-23	Aug-25	33 Session
Mauritius	2-Oct-20	Aug-24	31 Session
Mozambique	3-Jan-20	6-Sep-24	20 Pre Session
Namibia	1-Jan-20	6-Sep-24	20 Pre Session
Nigeria	26-Mar-21	6-Mar-25	21 Pre Session
Pakistan	18-Oct-19	Sep-26	35 Session
Seychelles	2-Nov-23	6-Sep-26	24 Pre Session
Sierra Leone	29-Aug-20	6-Mar-25	21 Pre Session
Sri Lanka	12-Mar-18/ 18-Oct-19	Sep-26	35 Session
Trinidad and Tobago	9-Jun-21 / 9-Jun-21	6-Aug-25	22 Pre Session
Tuvalu	14-Apr-23	6-Mar-25	32 Session
United Kingdom	8-Jul-23	6-Mar-26	23 Pre Session
Zambia	1-Oct-21	Mar-24	19 Pre Session

### UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEWS OF COMMONWEALTH COUNTRIES

COUNTRY	UPR SESSION	REVIEW DATE
Cyprus	47 <sup>th</sup> Session	04- 15 Nov 2024
New Zealand	46 <sup>th</sup> Session	29-April – 10 May 24
Vanatu	46 <sup>th</sup> Session	29-April – 10 May 24
Brunai Darussalam	47 <sup>th</sup> Session	04- 15 Nov 2024
Dominica	47 <sup>th</sup> Session	04- 15 Nov 2024
Guinea	47 <sup>th</sup> Session	04- 15 Nov 2024
Fiji	48 <sup>th</sup> Session	Jan- Feb 2025
Gambia	48 <sup>th</sup> Session	Jan- Feb 2025

### SRI LANKA - 19th Pre-Sessional Working Group of the CRPD

The 19th Pre-Sessional Working Group of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) convened on 25th March 2024, marking a pivotal moment for advocacy and accountability in Sri Lanka's disability rights landscape.

In 2023, the Government of Sri Lanka submitted its state party report to the CRPD committee detailing the country's progress on the rights of persons with disabilities. However, the report predominantly highlighted governmental initiatives and activities of non-governmental organizations, sidestepping the significant challenges faced by persons with disabilities in accessing their rights. Recognizing the gaps and the need for a more comprehensive perspective, the CRPD committee invited civil society organizations to submit alternative reports by January 2024. Seizing this opportunity, the Disability Organisations Joint Front, with the support of the International Disability Alliance (IDA), submitted an alternative report. Our report critically examined the current status of each right of persons with disabilities in Sri Lanka, provided recommendations, and posed pertinent questions for the state parties.

*“During the 19th Pre-Sessional Working Group meeting, I had the privilege to present our findings and concerns regarding the rights of persons with disabilities in Sri Lanka. Emphasizing the importance of an independent monitoring commission for persons with disabilities, I shed light on the ground realities and challenges faced by this marginalized community. The CRPD committee, in its quest for clarity and accountability, posed several questions seeking a deeper understanding of the current situation. I endeavoured to provide clear and concise responses, ensuring the committee was well-informed about the discrepancies between the state party report and our alternative report”.*

*“As we continue our advocacy journey, it is imperative to learn from global best practices on disability rights. I am eager to explore and adapt successful strategies and approaches from other countries to further strengthen and advance the rights of persons with disabilities in Sri Lanka”.*

*“The 19th Pre-Sessional Working Group was not just a platform for dialogue but a testament to the power of collective advocacy, transparency, and commitment to upholding the rights of persons with disabilities. Moving forward, we remain steadfast in our pursuit of a more inclusive and equitable society where every individual, regardless of their abilities, enjoys their fundamental rights and freedoms”.*



**RASANJALI PATHIRAGE** – CDPF Executive Officer  
President – Disability Organisations Joint Front (DOJF)

## ZAMBIA AT THE CRPD: - Fourteen years later - too close yet too far



On the 06<sup>th</sup> & 07<sup>th</sup> March 2024, the CRPD Committee held its consultative dialogue with Zambia. This was the first dialogue between the Committee and the delegation of Zambia, presenting an opportunity to reflect on strides made and areas for improvement. Some positive steps were noted in legislative reforms including the adoption of the Persons with Disabilities

Act (2012) and the Mental Health Act (2019). On the other side of the coin, the Committee expressed concerns about inconsistencies in standards specifically in the definition of persons with disabilities, deprivation of legal capacity, and introduction of guardianship under Article 4(2) and Article 4(3) of the Mental Health Act.

The Committee further noted that groups that face multiple and intersectional discrimination including women with disabilities, persons with albinism, and those with intellectual disabilities continued to be excluded. Key areas of concern included the lack of disability-inclusive gender policies and laws, the lack of a comprehensive framework to protect from attacks and killings of persons with albinism including delays in signing the Africa Union Plan of Action to End Attacks and Other Human Rights Violations Targeting Person with Disabilities in Africa (2021–2031) and the lack of reasonable accommodation for learners with intellectual disabilities. With regard to the institutional framework, a major concern was raised on the effectiveness of the Zambia Agency for Persons with Disabilities, with the Committee explicitly calling upon the government to provide resources and ensure coordination among all focal points for implementation of the CRPD.

*"It was indeed a great honour to be part of the Zambian team that participated in the preparatory, reporting, and review of the CRPD process. The engagement was meaningful with the members of the CRPD Committee about the myriad of challenges facing persons with disabilities in Zambia. Participating in this session enabled the Zambia team to experience first-hand the synergy between contributions made by Zambian OPDs and the insightful questions posed by the Committee to the State delegation under review. This was incredibly gratifying, although slightly disappointed by the responses from the State Party. However, we remain hopeful and inspired that our continued advocacy efforts, as well as recommendations from the CRPD Committee, will lead to continued progress toward the realization of the rights of persons with disabilities in Zambia".*

**MUSOLA CATHERINE KASEKETI** - President – Zambia Federation of Organisations of the Disabled (ZAFOD)



**MALAWI: EMPOWERING VOICES: DISABLED GIRLS & WOMEN ADVOCATE FOR INCLUSIVITY DURING CEDAW SESSION, GENEVA, SWITZERLAND – 09 -27 OCTOBER, 2023.**

We are excited to share a significant milestone in the advocacy for realization of rights for disabled women and girls in Malawi. For the first time in history, disabled women and girls from Malawi engaged with the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) at its 86<sup>th</sup> session held in Geneva, Switzerland from 9<sup>th</sup> -27<sup>th</sup> October, 2023. Disabled women representatives from the Federation of Disability Organizations in Malawi (FEDOMA), Disabled Women in Development (DIWODE), and Disabled Women in Africa (DIWA), joined forces to voice their concerns and advocate for meaningful change. This groundbreaking initiative was made possible with financial and technical support from the Disability Rights Fund (DRF) and Women Enabled International (WEI).

Malawian delegation addressed a spectrum of issues affecting disabled women and girls, from legislative gaps in having specific provisions for reasonable accommodations, barriers hindering access to quality healthcare services, inclusive education, and justice. The delegates also highlighted challenges related to political participation and the unique struggles faced by disabled rural women. We are pleased to note that the concluding observations from the CEDAW committee, released in late October, have acknowledged the concerns raised by the delegation.



In the picture, Malawi delegation to the CEDAW

The recommendations incorporate a recognition of the intersectionality that women and girls with disabilities encounter in their daily lives. CDPF Treasurer, MS. SCADER LOUIS was part of the delegation representing DIWA.

**SCADER LOUIS** - CDPF Treasurer & Federation of Disability Organisations in Malawi.

## RECOGNITIONS/ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### 24TH NCPEDP-LTIMINDTREE - HELEN KELLER AWARDS 2023



The National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP) -LTIMindtree Helen Keller Awards honour and celebrate the champions of disability inclusion in India. We hope that their contributions will inspire us to redouble our commitment to forge a path towards a

sustainable and equitable future. Sixteen (16) remarkable individuals and organizations were acknowledged for their outstanding contributions to fostering diversity and inclusivity in India's workforce. These awards not only recognize achievements but serve as catalysts for a shift towards a more inclusive and equitable professional landscape. More details about the individual could be viewed by visiting the [24th Helen Keller Awards BROACHER](#).

### 14<sup>TH</sup> NCPEDP-MPHASIS UNIVERSAL DESIGN AWARDS- 2023

The National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP) – Mphasis Universal Design Awards recognise 14 exceptional innovators at the 14th NCPEDP-Mphasis Universal Design Awards. For over a decade, these awards have recognized the outstanding work of those breaking barriers



for people with disabilities and promoting inclusivity across India. Honouring 14 Visionaries At the heart of the event were the extraordinary innovators who have devoted their time and passion to making a difference. These awards were a testament to their unwavering commitment to creating a world where everyone can thrive. To know more about each one of them, please read the brochure for [Universal Design Awards 2023](#).



*“On behalf of the Centre for Disability Law and Advocacy (CDLA), National Law University Odisha, it is with great pleasure and honour that we extend to you a formal invitation to join our Advisory Board. he CDLA is dedicated to fostering an inclusive environment for persons with disabilities as well as reaching out to stakeholders in the domain in the state and across the nation, for any assistance required for their well-being and inclusion”.*

“To safeguard the rights and to empower the persons with disability, the Centre is dedicated and committed to strive to work for providing assistance and sensitize on various issues to bring a new paradigm shift for ensuring “NO ONE IS LEFT BEHIND”.

“Through the establishment of a robust research team, we aim to engage in meaningful research activities and advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities. Your wealth of experience and commitment align seamlessly with our mission. The Centre endeavours to collaborate with the government bodies, academicians, NGOs, and various stakeholders to promote discussions on the importance of disability studies. We aim to create a multidisciplinary research environment, emphasising education, training, governmental collaborations and active participation in joint research initiatives which would help promote the wellbeing of the people. Your involvement in the Advisory Board will play a pivotal role in shaping the future of the Centre and contributing to our shared mission”.



## UPCOMING EVENTS

### BRIEF ON THE 17COSP: WHAT'S SIGNIFICANT THIS YEAR?

Seventeenth Session of the Conference of State Parties (17COSP) to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) will take place at the United Nations Headquarters, New York 11-13 June 2023. This year, the Overarching Theme of the Conference is ***RETHINKING DISABILITY INCLUSION IN THE CURRENT INTERNATIONAL JUNCTURE AND AHEAD OF THE SUMMIT OF THE FUTURE.***

*There are* another 03 Sub Themes namely;

Sub theme 1: International cooperation to promote technology innovations and transfer for an inclusive future, co-chaired by: Sri Lanka Vice President of the bureau and a civil society representative

Sub theme 2: Persons with disabilities in situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies, co-chaired by: Georgia Vice President of the bureau and a civil society representative

Sub theme 3: Promoting the rights of persons with disabilities to decent work and sustainable livelihood, co-chaired by: Greece Vice President of the bureau and a civil society representative

Keeping in line with the format and the tradition; this year also has the following program lineup where more than 45 formal/informal side events are also scheduled so far.

10 June 2024 from 10.00 am to 02.00 pm (Conference Room 04) **Civil Society Forum:**

[Official UN Official Web Page](#) for detailed information.



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