**COMMONWEALTH DISABLED PEOPLE’S FORUM CDPF**

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**Update on Progress on achieving a Commonwealth**

**Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP).**

The CDPF put forward a Disability Equality Action Plan in the run up to CHOGM in Samoa (Oct 2024).

We did this because although 55 of the 56 Commonwealth states have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, our member organisations report little progress on implementing the Rights for persons with disabilities/disabled people. CDPF represent National Umbrella OPD/DPOs in 52 Commonwealth countries. We wish to see concrete progress in disabled people’s lives protecting and promoting their rights, ensuring that disabled people can participate fully and equally in society by protecting us from discrimination, exploitation and abuse and promoting independent living , inclusive education and health, political rights and employment opportunities and fully including disabled people in preparations and responses to climate induced and other emergencies.

With over 430 million disabled people living in Commonwealth countries, it is important that the Rights contained in the UNCRPD are practically implemented for all those with long term impairments whether physical, sensory, mental or neurodiverse. The DIAP can only be fully implemented across thew 2.7 billion people of the Commonwealth with acceptance by all, cooperation and collaboration between Governments, Businesses and Civil Society. This will accelerate the quality and equality of life and resilience for all in line with the Values and Principles of the Commonwealth and the Strategic Plan 2025-30.

We were therefore pleased when thew Commonwealth Heads of Government in Samoa agreed ““6. Heads reaffirmed their commitment to ensuring, protecting and promoting the full

realisation of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all persons with disabilities, to fully implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (*UN*CRPD), and to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Recalling the 2023 Report of the Commonwealth Roundtable on Advancing the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Heads urged the Commonwealth Secretariat to prioritise and expedite the establishment of a High-Level Advisory Group of Persons with Disabilities together with representatives of Organisations of Persons with Disabilities from across the Commonwealth, to effectively support member states, in advancing the rights of people with disabilities. Heads commended the ongoing work towards the finalisation of a Disability Inclusion Action Plan, and the important role of National Human Rights Organisations in monitoring CRPD implementation.”

<https://commonwealthdpf.org/disability-inclusion-action-plan/>

Despite some delays, further progress is now being made to get a draft that all can agree to come to CHOGM 2026. An Expert Working Group of State Party representatives has been established and met three times. [Including-Chaired by Canada, Bahamas, Eswatini, Kenya, Lesotho, Malta, Mauritius, New Zealand, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Trinidad and Tobago, Togo, UK, with Australia, South Africa, Barbados likely to join]. An Advisory Group of representative Disabled People’s Organisations has also been established and met three times to provide comments to the Expert group [Sarah Kamau, Kenya Chair CDPF; Richard Rieser Gen Sec CDPF, UK; Abia Akram, Pakistan; Rachael Chimba, Zambia; Floyd Morris, Jamaica and Satareki Macanawai, Fiji]. An independent consultant has been appointed, Professor Anna Lawson of Leeds University. There is now a good prospect of getting an agreed draft to be discussed at a joint meeting of these two groups in October and November. When we receive Professor Lawson’s 2nd Draft of the DIAP we will put it up on line here with our further suggestions.

However, the Commonwealth Secretariat has insisted that these discussions should not cover the internal workings of the Commonwealth Secretariat including organising meetings and Conferences, accessibility and employment practices. CDPF have raised our concerns about this position with the Honourable Shirley Botchwey, Secretary General in writing and in person at a meeting on 30th July 2025.

CDPF is of the firm view that it would be opportune and beneficial to Disability Equality in the workings of the Commonwealth Secretariat if the Board comprising the London Based High Commissioners were to ask the Secretary General to now establish an internal working group to report to the Board in 12 months on proposed changes and we have written to them requesting this. The aim to achieve :-

1. Provision of access arrangements at Commonwealth events;
2. A fair representation of speakers and time at Ministerial and other events to cover policy implications and impacts on persons with disabilities
3. Developing a plan and timetable for Disability Equality training for all staff;
4. Allocation of funding and opportunities to raise new funds for disability equality work;
5. Employment of staff at all levels who identify as persons with disabilities who meet the requirements of the post with reasonable accommodations and gender equality;
6. Definite proposals and initiatives to enhance disability access to Marlborough House and other buildings and facilities used by the Commonwealth.

CDPF is of the view that a large multi-national organisation like the Commonwealth is in urgent need of such a policy initiative to provide fair representation of disability issues especially considering that there are now more than 450 million persons with disabilities living in the countries of the Commonwealth and all but one Commonwealth Countries have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Richard Rieser Gen Sec