**Promoting Leadership and Participation**

**of Persons with Disabilities in Peace Processes**

**Side-event on the occasion of the International Day of Persons with**

**Disabilities and Humanitarian Week**

**7 December 2021**

Remarks of Gerard Quinn,

[UN Special Rappporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities](https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/disability/srdisabilities/pages/srdisabilitiesindex.aspx)

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I want to sincerely thank the delegations of Poland, the US, Kenya, Germany and the Dominican Republic for organizing today’s side-event marking the International Day of persons with Disabilities and held under the auspices of the International Humanitarian Week.

One hundred years ago, my own country, Ireland, was convulsed by war, following by an even bloodier civil war. I am living proof that the pain is inter-generational. Eighty years ago, to this day, Pearl Harbour was attacked sparking a cataclysmic conflict. My extended family in Chicago were directly involved.

No one escapes war.

And no issue is more important than peace.

It is a sad reflection that some 75 years after the adoption of the UN Charter we still have so many hot wars in the world today. I can only imagine what the inter-generational effects will be long after we are gone.

As you are very well aware, the UN system tends to view the world through three different lenses: development, peace & security and human rights. The interesting thing about a topic as transversal as disability is that it genuinely spans all three. Its’ hard to segment the human condition.

When we started drafting the UN disability treaty it commenced life as a social development treaty. To its credit, Mexico brought that to the table. It quickly turned into a human rights *and* social development instrument.

And then along came Article 11 in the UN disability treaty – linking the advancement of the rights of persons with disabilities to the maintenance of peace. We are here today because of that deep logic.

Treaties – no matter how elegant – are not self-executing. That’s why UN Security Council Resolution 2475 was such a necessary building block – a historic building block.

Its rests on the foundations of the UN disability treaty. It is part of the re-set or re-framing of disability happening worldwide.

The most important message of the UN disability treaty has to do with the switch from object to subject – a switch that was earlier made in the Americans with Disabilities Act – a piece of legislation that changed our policy imagination right around the world.

So instead of thinking of persons with disabilities as passive recipients of largesse, we are now attuned to think of them as active human agents in their own lives - andin their own communities.

I do like the work of Joseph Schumpeter – the 1930s economist who coined the phrase ’disruptive creation.’ One can think of the UN disability treaty as creatively disruptive – as something that help us re-frame entire fields as diverse as development assistance and peace & security.

The ripple effects of the treaty in the field of peace & security are quite pronounced.

We explored that in our first Thematic Report last Summer on armed conflicts & disability. In it we took all points along the peace continuum - ranging from conflict prevention, to the conduct of hostilities, to humanitarian intervention, to peace keeping and, most importantly, to peace building. We assessed the visibility of persons with disabilities at each point on that continuum. And we assessed their moral agency – their voice – and whether that voice was taken seriously at all points along the continuum.

We concluded that persons with disabilities – despite their large numbers – remain largely invisible and their collective voice seldom heard on all points along the continuum. This finding has moved us to propose a more focused Thematic Report on the conduct of hostilities – on the visibility of persons with disabilities in the laws of war (due 2022) – as well as a more focused Thematic Report on peace building & disability (due 2023).

Let me say that the prospect of a more focused report on peace building & disability is one tht excites me. It plays directly to the core message of the UN disability treaty – the voice and human agency of persons with disabilities to be active agents of change in their own societies.

One way to mediate broken societies – societies broken along sectarian or other fault lines – is to provide a neutral space that compels the protagonists to focus on our common humanity. There is a lot of powerful anecdotal evidence from around the world about how such encounters of diverse protagonists on disability helps to establish a modicum of trust a – key ingredient in initiating a lasting peace process. I especially commend the pioneering work of Diane Richler in this regard. She has begun to document this process and is bringing to light a reality that has been hidden in plain view.

More than many, people with disabilities instinctively grasp the necessity of re-building societies to be more inclusive. In the 19th century there was a famous debate between Lord Acton and john Stuart Mill about which kind of society would be more sustainable -a closed homogenous one, or an open more inclusive one. Lord Action came down in favour of inclusion. I am with Lord Action – and so too is the UN disability treaty. The UN CRPD Committee has described the underlying theory of equality in the treaty as ‘*inclusive* equality.’ So, you have a ready-made and very sizeable constituency for inclusion as a bedrock for mending broken societies.

And of course, persons with disabilities have their own issues which directly affect them as we try to build peace. The dividend for more inclusive societies affects all and is particularly telling for the ‘farthest left behind’ which most assuredly includes persons with disabilities.

I feel very privileged to be part of today.

I see today’s side-event as building on the historic Security Council Resolution 2475.

I see it as a step in expanding our policy imagination.

I see it as helping the international community to re-think, enrich and hopefully expand our thinking about peace-building – to mend broken societies, to embed inclusion not just as an outcome but as a way of building and keeping the peace.

And I very much look forward to your deliberations.

Thank you.

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