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**Submission of the International Disability Alliance (IDA) to the co-facilitation process on the 2020 review of the UN human rights treaty body system**

**7 July 2020**

The [International Disability Alliance](http://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/) (IDA) is a network of 14 global and regional organisations of persons with disabilities, advocating at the United Nations for a more inclusive global environment for everyone. We support organisations of persons with disabilities to hold their governments to account and advocate for change locally, nationally and internationally, having the UN [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf) (CRPD) as a cornerstone of our work.

We welcome the call for submissions from the co-facilitators, Morocco and Switzerland, and its extension to all stakeholders to submit written contributions as part of the process for the consideration of the state of the UN human rights treaty body system. This submission is focused on question number 17. “Accessibility for persons with disabilities and wider accessibility and visibility of the work of the treaty bodies”. Other questions are endorsed in the joint civil society submission led by TB-Net, the NGO Network on UN Treaty Bodies.

Under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), accessibility is conceived as a precondition to ensure that persons with disabilities have access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas (Article 9 of the Convention).

With regard to the UN Treaty Bodies System, the only Committee that is accessible to persons with disabilities remains the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which provides, inter alia, live captioning and sign language interpretation (international and national) in all public and private meetings, including during videoconference and in the webcast.

In line with the principles and obligations of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and with the recent [United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS)](https://www.un.org/en/content/disabilitystrategy/assets/documentation/UN_Disability_Inclusion_Strategy_english.pdf) and its objective to ensure the UN system is fit for purpose in relation to disability inclusion as well as its indicator n. 5 (Consultations with persons with disabilities) and indicator n. 6 (Accessibility), the UN Treaty Bodies system shall strive to adopt, as a minimum, the standards of the CRPD Committee, including the provision of reasonable accommodation[[1]](#footnote-1) to all persons with disabilities engaging with the system in any capacity, and the implementation of the principle of universal design[[2]](#footnote-2).

In this regard, it is advisable to establish a standalone fund, common to all UN Treaty Bodies, for the provision of reasonable accommodation and accessibility requirements, so as to make sure financial constraints do not impact solely on the CRPD Committee.

Accessibility should not be considered as the adoption of minimum standard measures as its full realisation requires the active consultation with and meaningful engagement of persons with disabilities, including children, through their representative organizations. Moreover, it is fundamental to consult with organizations representing different constituencies of persons with disabilities, to cover the diversity of accessibility requirements.

As a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, much of the Treaty Bodies work has been moved online. As it is likely that online working and meetings will continue to play a major role in the future, it is fundamental to consider the accessibility of the selected platforms to ensure the participation of all persons with disabilities, whether they are Committee members, governments delegates, NHRIs or civil society representatives, or UN staff, and to make sure they are easy to use.

Therefore, as a minimum, we recommend that:

* All Treaty Bodies meetings, including online meetings, are made accessible, as a minimum (not excluding other reasonable accommodations when needed), through the provision of sign language interpretation and live captioning.
* That all related documents and information, including on the respective websites, are also provided in Plain English and Easy-Read, as well as in formats accessible to screen-readers’ software.
* Ensure that all meeting rooms are physically accessible and that the room settings are easy to navigate.
* Encourage committee members, governments’ delegates, NHRI’s and civil society representatives to communicate in plain language during dialogues and meetings, so that so that information is more easily understood by all and facilitates their active engagement
* Install audio/hearing loops[[3]](#footnote-3) or other audio technology in meeting rooms, as well as information about the availability of such equipment.
* Include a trauma warning system for all Committees’ meetings, to warn the audience when issues related to violence, conflict, torture, and other traumas are being discussed.
* Provide an “accessibility information package” for persons with disabilities engaging with the system.
1. “Reasonable accommodation” means necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms (CRPD Article 2) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. "Universal design" means the design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. "Universal design" shall not exclude assistive devices and/or specific support services for particular groups of persons with disabilities where this is needed (CRPD Article 2) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. An [audio loop](https://services.anu.edu.au/information-technology/audio-visual/hearing-loops#:~:text=visual%20%C2%BB%20Hearing%20loops-,Hearing%20loops,that%20reduce%20clarity%20of%20sound.) or hearing loop is a system that transmits an audio signal directly into a hearing aid via a magnetic field reducing background noise, reverberation and other acoustic distortions that hinder the clarity of sounds. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)