**Response to Human Rights Council Resolution A/HRC/RES/41/21 on human rights and climate change from Telerehabilitation International**

1. *Please describe the impacts of the adverse effects of climate change on the full and effective enjoyment of the human rights of persons with disabilities. Where possible, please share specific examples and stories.*

The impacts of climate change on the full and effective enjoyment of the human rights of persons with disabilities are occurring on a daily basis. In developed countries, the impacts include an inability for persons with disabilities to go outdoors and experience the daily joys of life because of the change in weather patterns as described in [Spinal Cord Injury and Climate Change](https://youtu.be/5Q5E5tibDYI). In addition, people in developed countries suffer from the effects of hurricanes and extreme weather events with a resultant lack of power and gasoline which results in stress for them and their family members. [Climatechangeandspinalmuscularatrophy](https://youtu.be/BMW9C8Vj-m8) These effects can last a long time as evidenced by the toll Hurricane Maria took on Puerto Rico where persons with disabilities did not have power for up to six months after the storm.

1. *Please describe any relevant commitments, legislation, policies and other measures that you have taken, in compliance with applicable international human rights law, in particular the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, to promote an approach to climate change mitigation and adaptation that ensures the full and effective enjoyment of the human rights of persons with disabilities. Please also note and identify any relevant mechanisms for ensuring accountability for these commitments including their means of implementation.*

In 2019, Telerehabilitation International worked with professionals and consumers to launch [Day for Tomorrow](https://www.dayfortomorrow.org/), a day that could be the parallel to Earth Day but focusing on the impacts of climate change on people, especially those with disabilities. I, Dr. Marca Alexander in conjunction with Dr. Craig Alexander, also started a mission with a goal of walking from Canada to Key West in the United States to identify people with disabilities that have been impacted by extreme weather and climate change. During this journey, there were community walk/rolls held in collaboration with the Mayor’s offices on persons with Disabilities, various non-profit organizations and various universities in New York City and Philadelphia, PA to bring attention to the issues of persons with disabilities in climate change and extreme weather. I also gave lectures at 10 academic medical centers and medical schools regarding this topic. During this time period we also obtained non-profit status for Telerehabilitation International, an organization focused on educating the public about issues related to climate change, quality of life, and persons with disabilities and developing a volunteer group of physiatrists (medical specialists in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation) who are willing to do physician to physician telemedicine consultations in disaster areas. After a hiatus to work on other ways to bring attention to this concern, I am resuming my walk in Washington DC on January 6, 2020 with plans to walk to Richmond Virginia by January 13.

1. *Please share a summary of any relevant data that captures how the adverse effects of climate change have affected persons with disabilities, taking into account multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination (i.e. discrimination based on a combination of multiple grounds, including disability, gender, race, colour, sex, language, religion, nationality and migration status).*

The attached paper, A bellweather for climate change and disability: educational needs

of rehabilitation professionals regarding disaster management and spinal cord injuries, published 11/19 indicates that 58% of professionals believed that climate change had already impacted their client’s well-being. Moreover, 86% of professionals were interested in more information about the topic. While this is only one source of information, in order to answer the questions and issues associated with climate change, multiple sources of information are necessary.

1. *Please describe mechanisms and tools that can be used to measure and monitor the impacts of climate change on the full and effective enjoyment of the human rights of persons with disabilities.*

The US National Institute of Disability, Independent Living and Rehabilitation Research hosts three model systems of care: spinal cord injury, traumatic brain injury and burn. These systems of care have databases that could be utilized to document ongoing needs and related solutions for persons with disabilities related to climate change.

Governing bodies such as hospital accreditation organizations could include the need to educate people about the potential impact of disasters and climate change on persons with disabilities and require that hospitals track relevant data related to admissions and other morbidities as part of their accreditation criteria.

1. *Please identify and share examples of good practices and challenges in the promotion, protection, and fulfilment of the human rights of persons with disabilities in the context of the adverse effects of climate change. Please include examples that highlight multilateral cooperation and approaches that are implemented in close consultation with and with the active involvement of persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, through their representative organizations.*

It is difficult to bring attention to the issues of disability and climate change. We have working throughout 2019 to bring attention via [Canada to Key West](https://www.facebook.com/Canada2KeyWest) through social media, reaching out to independent living centers, through collaboration with consumer groups, professional organizations and through city offices of disabilities. Unfortunately, it was difficult to bring attention to our efforts. Moreover, it was stated on multiple occasions that people with disabilities may have interest, however, they may not have “enough bandwidth” to pay attention to another concern in life.

This emphasizes why a multipronged approach is necessary and underscores the need to work through whatever methods possible can get people’s interest and attention such as Day for Tomorrow. Day for Tomorrow events were held in the US, Europe, and in Africa in 2019. See [Moshiwalk](https://www.facebook.com/Canada2KeyWest/photos/pcb.763358567433124/763356210766693/?type=3&__tn__=HH-R&eid=ARAQNsU6p7GEF1AHuiXuYmW3qaUgQKH8fEko4K2Jfeq_xl0_yhO629Tf2foF-og-CPMfc0QZVsu5Z9ID&__xts__%5B0%5D=68.ARBBFawF38EZmA7BrD1lVhewZvTsl2IcVudMfBg4I8xvVaxkHlvXyDvELKwQvSbaqvvyg_o5sE-S6qq3FKqixR2xW44it03ZLm_dY4P2GJGR1rD3Oxehgz1tq2lhkT4683cKftcEaYnTig-pk34s02QNBoFo45cTu5wH-7x1FxKxyHo9FRz3Hk2IIQWXBiXT31iOelIvntZlQSFvBMC7j2d1V5Q4wQSrnabiFz40-g3JX0B7zayKkNd0Vyqj2i_o_kvpkTK0nx7ngM_7c7cNYY3ZTFO7DRpU93peRhYiekqxtKVtR4NZoRy1PgQKrFWEUzE8hmlrhoHaNzl9cQiCcV4). Participants learned about the impacts of climate change and disability and the need for community preparedness and collaboration regarding extreme weather events. In 2020, we are encouraging events on October 4th or whatever time works at local sites.

In hopes of spreading the message, I have also been working to highlight the issues of people with disabilities through travelling to areas where there were disasters to interview people and then posting videos on [Sustain Abilities](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1TsaBa5RyVrNCCSSDKVmoA?view_as=subscriber). In 2020 this work will continue and the information will be transferred to a website called sustainourabilities.org. This website will also host information related to disaster planning for persons with disabilities, best practices and be the host site for any related work. Because of the nature of this problem, work is necessary on multiple fronts utilizing multiple interdisciplinary groups.

Other “best practices” that I have discovered in 2019 include the Veterans Health Administration SCI services site in Houston, Texas. They have a system whereby they monitor their patients during disasters, offer some the ability to be housed at the hospital during disasters and followup in person or face to face after disasters with people. We have been in communication with Dr. Sally Anne Holmes who is the chief of the SCI service there and we will be describing and sharing this best practice via the sustainourabilities.org website in 2020.

Another organization we will be highlighting in 2020 is the Eli Foundation. The Eli Foundation is currently working on the building of a self-sustainable accessible shelter for persons with disabilities on the island of Puerto Rico to use in times of future hurricanes/disasters.

1. *Please provide any additional information you believe would be useful to support climate action that promotes the full and effective enjoyment of the rights of persons with disabilities.*

I left my full time job as a rehabilitation physician in 2019 to work on the issue of climate change and disability. I focused all of my efforts on the process; however, I felt as if I was unsuccessful in bringing the attention to the problem that it deserves. This is a very uphill battle to fight. I was successful in obtaining interest from some of the academic organizations related to disability to have an interest in climate change; however, it has been very difficult to get organizations working on climate change to have an interest in people with disabilities. This is clearly unfortunate for two reasons:

1)People with disabilities are the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

2)People with disabilities comprise 25% of the world’s population and if we can get them to speak up about climate change it will help in the overall global fight against climate change.

In light of this, we are trying a new approach to work on the problem. Telerehabilitation International and the Center for Research on Women with Disabilities located at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Texas are working together to plan a high level summit on Climate Change and Disability which will be name “Sustain our Abilities”. Our goal is to have this summit in 1st or 2nd quarter 2021, bringing together leaders from the climate change and disability communities to create a vision for how the two communities can best integrate and roadmap to achieve this vision.

While all of these ideas are individually important, no one organization, individual or country can solve the perils of climate change and disability on their own. Thus, I am very grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this survey and hope that Telerehabilitation International can continue to participate in this type of work and information sharing with the United Nations in the future.

Respectfully submitted,

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