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Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities

15 April 2020

Excellency,

I have the honour to address you in my capacity as Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 35/6.

States and public health authorities around the world are taking swift action to contain the COVID-19 outbreak. While the ongoing health, economic and social crisis is unprecedented for everyone, persons with disabilities worldwide are at a much higher risk of/when contracting the virus, and to experience the negative impact of containment measures. This situation is aggravated by their pre-existing health conditions as well as by prevailing structural barriers, discrimination, poverty, and the lack of accessibility, social protection and adequate support, which prevent persons with disabilities from accessing public services, including healthcare, on an equal basis with others.

I am deeply concerned, in particular, by the immense challenges that persons with disabilities are experiencing due to emergency measures, which have resulted in the disruption of support networks essential for their survival; the rise of discriminatory triage protocols that restrict access to health care and life-saving measures, including ventilators; and their isolation in institutions, nursing homes, psychiatric and other facilities that have become hotspots of the pandemic, where 40 to 50 per cent of the fatalities take place.

At this critical time, it is imperative to guarantee that all COVID-19 responses are disability-inclusive. This requires our joint efforts more than ever, guided by a human rights-based approach, in strong consultation with persons with disabilities and their representative organizations. To help States in effectively addressing these concerns, I have worked with the World Health Organization, other United Nations entities and organizations of persons with disabilities to develop two practical guidance documents to address the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of national responses to COVID-19. These are:

1. [*WHO Disability considerations during the COVID-19*](#), a guidance for action by persons with disabilities, governments, healthcare workers, disability service providers, the community, as well as actions to be taken in institutional settings.

2. *Disability inclusive social protection response to COVID-19 crisis*, with concrete suggestions to make the most of social protection measures to reduce the impact of the pandemic on persons with disabilities.

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I call upon you to disseminate these guidance documents widely within your respective governments. For States requiring more detailed information, over the years my mandate has developed [guidance](#) to operationalize the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the human rights-based approach to disability.

I stand ready to provide clarifications, share information and good practices available at the international level. Should you wish to contact me, please write to Ms. Cristina Michels, Human Rights Officer supporting my mandate at the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva (cmichels@ohchr.org, sr.disability@ohchr.org).

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "C. Devandas-Aguilar". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Catalina Devandas-Aguilar
Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities

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