

## **Disability in Emergencies and Conflicts – *‘Reaching the most vulnerable’***

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### **Chair’s summary**

1. Representatives of governments, development agencies, international organisations and civil society, including representative organisations of persons with disabilities, were gathered in Oslo on 30-31 May 2011 to discuss ways to respond to situations of risk, including situations of armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies and the occurrence of natural disasters;
2. The conference is the first of its kind, and has provided a unique opportunity to share experience and views and assess means of ensuring that persons with disabilities are included at all levels and in all responses to emergencies and conflict;
3. There has been recognition of the fact that the exclusion, risk of marginalisation and discrimination of persons with disabilities are largely due to exclusionary policies and practices, inaccessible planning and lack of participation of persons with disabilities in disaster and emergency preparedness. In addition, attitudinal barriers towards persons with disabilities and the lack of knowledge regarding the challenges that persons with disabilities face contribute further to exclusion;
4. Persons with disabilities are at increased risk of not surviving an emergency or conflict situation because they are often kept out of sight, left behind and lack access to relief assistance and information. Persons with disabilities often find that their communities are changed drastically during a crisis, which adds barriers to their accessibility or mobility, generally reducing their possibilities of benefiting from pre-existing risk reduction strategies and measures as well as emergency and disaster response measures;
5. Stigma and other attitudinal phenomena cause persons with disabilities to be hidden from view, resulting in a lack of visibility in censuses, and other registration mechanisms. The experience shared at this conference demonstrates that it is possible to identify persons with disabilities in an emergency situation when collaboration between stakeholders takes place, especially with local organisations representing persons with disabilities;
6. Our attention has been drawn to the frameworks established by the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (1997) and the Convention on Cluster Munitions (from 2008, in force 1 Jan. 2010), which established a new norm for victim assistance. The presentation from Afghanistan shows how the understanding of victim assistance has evolved from the physical rehabilitation of

victims of war, to the inclusion of all persons with disabilities. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD) contributes to the development of this understanding. In particular Articles 11 and 32 of the UNCPRD reinforce this point by calling on all governments and all other stakeholders to actively integrate the concerns and needs of all persons with disabilities into their response to emergency situations and humanitarian crises;

7. An understanding of disability issues and the needs of persons with disabilities must be an integral part of both humanitarian actions in emergencies and long-term development planning to reduce poverty and reach the MDGs.
8. It is now clear that the time has come for implementation, monitoring and reporting. In short: for collective action. We have standards, now we need to act and be concrete, using and adapting already available guidelines and other tools.

**During the presentations and panel discussions, a number of key principles and human rights have been highlighted that I would like to address briefly here:**

9. It is vital to uphold the dignity, individual autonomy and independence of persons with disabilities in emergency situations and humanitarian crises. Also to recognise that persons with disabilities often need special protection during situations of risk;
10. The rights of persons with disabilities not to be discriminated against and to enjoy the full range of their human rights on an equal basis with others. Persons with disabilities have the right to access to justice and to be heard in reconciliation processes;
11. Accessibility is a principle as well as a prerequisite for participation. The principle of accessibility includes social access, information access, intellectual access, physical access and economic access;
12. The right to participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organisations,<sup>1</sup> with its particular relevance to international cooperation generally<sup>2</sup> and situations of emergencies and conflicts in particular. As an extension of this, the need for avenues of redress and complaint mechanisms to keep organisations and governments accountable to persons with disabilities;
13. The recognition that persons with disabilities are a diverse group, consisting of individuals who live in specific contexts. Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical,

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<sup>1</sup> Article 4 (3) UNCPRD

<sup>2</sup> Article 32 (1) UNCPRD

mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

**In our deliberations recommendations for action have been put forward. Some of the key action points to consider are:**

14. It is essential that the principles of non-discrimination of persons with disabilities are effectively incorporated into all measure taken to design, plan and implement policies and programmes related to situations of risk;
  
15. All work to strengthen the protection and participation of women in emergencies and humanitarian crises must include women with disabilities in order to be effective and reach all. This requires that gender analysis, which is a natural part of assessments, addresses the different needs, interests and challenges of women/girls and men/boys with disabilities;
  
16. There is a specific need to protect **women and girls with disabilities** from being subjected to multiple or aggravated forms of discrimination as well as sexual exploitation and abuse in situations of risk;<sup>3</sup>
  
17. Children with disabilities are at increased risk during and after emergencies and crises. Special attention must be paid to meeting their needs and securing their rights, especially their right and access to education on the same basis as other children.
  
18. The physical environment, including camp security, location and layout, the venues providing humanitarian assistance, the provision of goods and services, and the information provided must be designed, built and implemented in accordance with the principle of **universal design**;
  
19. Persons with disabilities and their representative organisations must be **consulted and empowered to participate** in the design, planning and implementation of policies, programmes, services and the response to disaster, relief, early recovery and reconstruction, both after and in preparation for situations of risk. One example that was mentioned is the importance of having DPOs in UN clusters. This is of vital importance in order to have the desired effect and results on the ground and to meet people's real needs.
  
20. **Data collection, analysis and dissemination** of information regarding persons with disabilities are vital and urgent. Actions that can be taken are:

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<sup>3</sup> Ministerial Declaration, July 2010

- Swift and systematic identification and registration of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, with particular attention to those who cannot communicate their own needs in order to identify protection and assistance needs;
- disaggregation of data by sex, age and impairment and, where possible, by barriers to access and inclusion; and
- development of indicators that can support legislative developments, policymaking and national systems for reporting on progress and impact;

21. **International cooperation** is important, particularly through the use of multilateral mechanisms, including the timely provision of humanitarian assistance through all phases of situations of risk, from relief to recovery and development, including the provision of adequate resources;

22. There is a need for better regional and international **cooperation** in responding to situations of risk, including South-South, South-North and North-North cooperation and coordination. This may involve:

- sharing best practices, e.g. the establishment of a reservoir/pool of experience,
- capacity building, including the sharing of information,
- cooperation on research, emphasising the inclusion of persons with disabilities
- addressing the gap in research and knowledge about the needs of persons with intellectual disabilities in emergencies and situations of conflict;
- access to scientific and technical knowledge;
- sharing of guidelines
- Sharing concrete examples that others can use straight away, (universal design – Iraq)

23. There is a need to follow up Article 33 of the UNCRPD by **designating focal points** within governments to ensure implementation and a holistic monitoring system. It would also be useful for other organisations and institutions to establish a similar focal point system in order to ensure that disability issues and the concerns of people with disabilities are taken into account at all stages of planning and implementation. These focal points must be given the time and resources needed to fulfil their tasks and should report to senior members of staff.

24. **Community Based Interventions** are central to successful efforts. Designing programmes and policies that reach persons where they live in communities, utilising the guidance of the Community Based Rehabilitation Guidelines of the World Health Organization,<sup>4</sup> can strengthen disaster preparedness and emergency response.

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<sup>4</sup> WHO CBR Guidelines: <http://www.who.int/disabilities/cbr/guidelines/en/index.html>

25. When **rebuilding** the community in the aftermath of disasters, emergencies and crises, it is important to build back better. It is necessary to extend the Sphere standards to include the concerns of persons with disabilities and to involve persons with disabilities in finding and developing solutions to ensure participation and accessibility and promote independent living. This is also necessary when developing national standards for disaster and emergency preparedness.

26. There is a need to promote the **mainstreaming** of disability into humanitarian organisations and other stakeholders, so as to integrate the concerns and needs of persons with disabilities at all levels of planning and implementation, making this an organisational responsibility.

27. **Strengthening and supporting DPOs** to become relevant and strong partners is an important task for donors and humanitarian organisations, as well as development agencies. Nurturing local leadership and capacities for DPOs to be effective actors in planning and responding to emergencies and crises is a viable strategy, including in the recovery period. As Foreign Minister Støre mentioned yesterday, this includes empowering people with disabilities to advocate for their own legal rights.

To conclude, I would like to note the following two points:

- The EU and 99 countries have ratified the UNCRPD. This gives us a unique, historic opportunity to act and draw attention to the situation of persons with disabilities in emergencies and crises.
- We welcome the clear signals and commitments from the Norwegian Government, both from Ministers Jonas Gahr Støre and Audun Lysbakken, and also at lunch today from State Secretary Gry Larsen. They open up for the inclusion of civil society organisations, including DPOs, in the negotiations on an Arms Trade Treaty, which is a positive and important initiative. It is now up to civil society organisations and the DPO community in Norway to follow up on this.