



New York, March 23, 2020

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Dear Colleagues of the Conference of States Parties to the CRPD,

As you are keenly aware, the outbreak of the COVID-19 has already created unprecedented disruptions in countries and cities around the world. At the UNHQs, the United Nations has been extensively communicating and coordinating with local authorities of the host country to ramp up preparedness and response plans. The UN leadership is continuing to address the COVID-19 crises, including the transmission dynamics in various locations; the future likely spread of the virus; the reliance on physical measures for prevention, in view of the very large number of people from across the globe expected to participate in future UN meetings.

Today, I am writing to you concerning the current situation with regard to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) and the decision taken by the Bureau of the Conference of States Parties to the CRPD last Friday, 20 March 2020 to postpone the 13th session of the Conference until the second week of December 2020. This postponement includes the election of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in order that the integrity of the COSP programme should be maintained within the allocated resource for the conference services for the 13th session. The decision was also informed by the Secretariat's presentation of the United Nations' responses to the COVID-19 crisis as well as by inputs from other stakeholders, in particular the organizations of persons with disabilities. The dates, however, remain tentative at this time as the Secretariat is in the process of reconstructing the official calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations in 2020, which will be submitted to the Committee of Conferences for its approval. Additionally the Bureau was also informed that there is a possibility that the scaling down of the rescheduled Conference may also need to take place in this regard.

The Bureau will further consult with Member States, relevant UN offices and stakeholders in the coming months in view of the fluidity of the COVID-19 crisis around the world.

As further noted by the UN Secretary-General, I understand that the United Nations will continue to assess the overall risk and the implications for all forthcoming intergovernmental meetings at the Headquarters and elsewhere, taking into account rapidly evolving circumstances.



We, as the Bureau of the Conference of States Parties to the CRPD, recognize that persons with disabilities may be more disadvantaged and often experience additional difficulties in current challenging situations in affected countries and travels.

We urge all States parties and other stakeholders to address in their response to the outbreak of the COVID-19, the inclusion of the unaddressed situations of persons with disabilities, in particular their specific needs in the emergency planning and response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

It should be emphasized that persons with disabilities require the same resources and assistance to those without disabilities, including timely and accessible information and instructions, uninterrupted social and medical services, and the protection from the spread of the COVID-19 while taking into account specific needs of individuals with disabilities. For example the International Disability Alliance has dedicated its page on covid-19 <http://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/covid-19>

Over 100 disability advocacy organizations and a coalition of disability rights and emergency management experts in the host country recently made an urgent call for immediate response, addressing the specific needs of persons with disabilities to maintain their health, safety, dignity, and independence in the community throughout the COVID-19 outbreak and related health emergencies.

“Persons with disabilities must be able to receive timely and accessible information about what steps they must take to minimize the risk of infection; what actions are being taken that may affect their living arrangements; and the availability of services, caregivers, medication, and other changes critical to their personal planning and preparedness that may directly impact their daily life. Instructions must also be provided for service providers in accessible formats to maximize their health and minimize the spread of infection. This includes ensuring that all televised public announcements are live-captioned and provided by qualified sign language interpreters. Websites and other digital and electronic information must be accessible to people with vision, hearing, learning, and dexterity disabilities, and to individuals who do not read print because of their disability. This must include information to be delivered via assistive technology such as text-to-speech devices and Braille readers. All communications must utilize plain language to maximize understanding and the information must be provided in languages they can communicate”(Excerpts from “National Call to Action” on 3 March 2020 by the World Institute on Disability/Partnership for Inclusive Disaster

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Strategies/National Council on Independent Living Emergency Preparedness Subcommittee)

With this in mind, the Bureau is also exploring alternative working arrangements including videoconferencing or other means of remote communication to organize meeting with other stakeholders on relevant issues to the organization of work of COSP13.

I will keep you informed of any further developments with regard to the rescheduling of the 13th session of the COSP.

In solidarity with all our colleagues, in particular with the global disability community, to ensure progress toward an inclusive, accessible and sustainable world for and with persons with disabilities even at this challenging time in our human history.



Luis Gallegos

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To the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
Permanent Representative of Ecuador to the United Nations

To All States Parties
to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
New York