

12 June 2018

Everyone has ‘a moral imperative’ to uphold the rights of persons with disabilities, says UN Secretary general at the 11th session of the Conference of State Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

It is my pleasure to join you at this 11th session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

This Convention protects the rights of some

1.5 billion people around the world, and is one of the most widely-ratified international human rights treaties, with 177 ratifications since its adoption in 2006.

It is a historical commitment which reaffirms that people with disabilities are entitled to exactly the same rights as everyone else, and that societies must be organized so that all people, including those with disabilities, can exercise their rights freely.

But signing and ratifying the Convention is not enough. Implementation is essential. Countries must apply the Convention to their development policies, investments and legal systems, if we are to fulfil the central pledge of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: to leave no one behind.

Societies will never achieve the SDGs without the full participation of everyone, including people with disabilities. We cannot afford to ignore or marginalize the contributions of 1.5 billion people.

Upholding the rights of people with disabilities is a moral imperative. But it is not an act of charity. It is a recognition of rights and a practical necessity, if we are to build healthy, sustainable societies to the benefit of everyone – those with disabilities, and those without.

Distinguished Delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

I strongly believe that despite many international agreements and initiatives, we must all – Member States, the UN system, civil society, the private sector, and all stakeholders – do much more to ensure that people with disabilities have full access to opportunities and can participate fully in society.

This is why advancing the rights of persons with disabilities is firmly situated at the heart of the 2030 Agenda – our global blueprint for peaceful, prosperous societies on a healthy planet.

From the workplace to public transport systems, from concert halls to cyberspace and daily social interactions, people with disabilities face overt discrimination, stereotyping, and lack of respect for their basic human rights.

There is also a strong gender dimension to disability. Women and girls are disproportionately affected, particularly in the poorest countries in the world. Every minute, more than 30 women are seriously injured or disabled during childbirth.

Women and girls with disabilities face multiple barriers to accessing education, health services and jobs. Without women’s empowerment and gender equality, millions of women will continue to suffer from double discrimination based on both their gender and their disability.

We must all find new approaches and tools to work for and with people with disabilities.

These should include mainstreaming disability in national legislation and development strategies;

and engaging and empowering people with disabilities, and the organizations that represent them.

It must also include raising awareness. Discrimination against people with disabilities has been going on for centuries. It will take major efforts to challenge stereotypes and to change mindsets. The powerful advocacy of the disability rights movement and the inspiring achievements of women and men with disabilities in all walks of life, from the science lab to the sports field, are creating lasting change.

It will also be crucial to continue and expand the work that United Nations agencies are doing to support Governments and develop their capacity on these issues.

We need to strengthen the policy frameworks and laws on disability at the multilateral and global level, in line with the Convention and the 2030 Agenda. If people with disabilities are to be part of our efforts to achieve the SDGs, we must make institutions, mechanisms and processes coherent and coordinated.

This is the backdrop for the first flagship report on disability and development, which I will release later this year. I thank the many experts from Member States, United Nations Agencies, organizations representing people with disabilities and other stakeholders who are contributing for the preparation of that report.

At the same time, in order to make sure that the United Nations is leading by example, I have also initiated a comprehensive review of our work in this area.

The review will look at all aspects of how the United Nations addresses disability, from accessibility, where there is still a lot to go, and employment to mainstreaming disabilities across all our work, particularly development and humanitarian aid. It will inform a new UN Action Plan and an accountability framework to help us aim higher and live up to our promises.

I count on the strong support of Member States and other stakeholders as we move forward with this effort.

This 11th session of the Conference of States Parties is an opportunity to reflect on gaps and identify concrete steps to implement the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in full, and in a timely way.

I look forward to the outcomes of this Conference.

I count on your continued efforts by, for and with people with disabilities.

Together, we can remove barriers and raise awareness, so that people with disabilities can play a full part in every sphere of society, around the world.

Thank you.