

## Panel discussion on the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of climate change

*Concept note (draft as of 11 June 2020)*

- Date and venue:** TBC  
*Will be broadcast live and archived at <http://webtv.un.org>*
- Objectives:** This panel discussion will focus on good practices and lessons learned in the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of the adverse impact of climate change. The objectives are:
- **To enhance understanding** of the impacts of climate change on the rights of persons with disabilities;
  - **To highlight the benefits** of disability-inclusive climate action;
  - **To identify good practices** in the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of the adverse impacts of climate change;
  - **To share lessons learned** in promoting disability-inclusive climate action;
  - **To identify opportunities** for collaboration and action by States, civil society and other relevant stakeholders to implement a disability-inclusive approach to climate action that benefits people and planet;
  - **To identify opportunities** for international cooperation in mitigation and adaptation actions which promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities.
- Chair:** H.E. Ms. Elisabeth Tichy-Fisslberger, President of the Human Rights Council – TBC
- Opening statement:** Ms. Michelle Bachelet, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights – TBC
- Panellists:**
- **Ms. Catalina Devandas Aguilar**, Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities – TBC
  - **Mr. Sébastien Jodoin**, Assistant Professor at the McGill University Faculty of Law and Canada Research Chair in Human Rights and the Environment – TBC
  - **Ms. Amalia A. Decena**, President of Handicapables Association of Cagayan, Philippines (*video message*) – TBC
  - **Ms. Deborah Iyute Oyuu**, social worker and human rights activist (*video message*) – TBC
- Outcome:** The panel discussion will provide an opportunity for States, international organizations and other relevant stakeholders to discuss the adverse impacts of climate change on the effective enjoyment of the rights of persons with disabilities and the promotion and protection of their rights through disability-inclusive climate action. The anticipated outcomes of this discussion include:
- **Improved understanding** of the impacts of climate change on the rights of persons with disabilities, including good practices in the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of the adverse impacts of climate change;
  - The **identification of strategies and lessons learned** with respect to the participation of persons with disabilities in climate action;
  - The **identification of opportunities** for international cooperation with respect to mitigation and adaptation actions which promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities;

- **Recommendations** for a disability-inclusive approach to climate action at all levels of governance;
- A **summary report** of the panel discussion to the Human Rights Council.

**Mandate:** In its resolution [41/21](#) on human rights and climate change, the Human Rights Council decided to incorporate into its programme of work for the 44th session a panel discussion on the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of climate change. The Council requested the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to submit a summary report of the panel discussion to the Council at its 46th session and to make the report available in accessible formats, including Plain Language and Easy-to-Read.

**Format (to be confirmed):** The panel discussion will be limited to two hours. The opening statements and initial presentations by the panellists will be followed by an interactive discussion divided into two slots. A maximum of one hour will be set aside for the podium, including opening statements, panellists' presentations and their responses to questions and concluding remarks. The remaining hour will be reserved for two slots of interventions from the floor for States and observers (2x12), national human rights institutions (2x1) and non-governmental organizations (2x2).

The list of speakers for the discussion will be established through the online inscription system and, as per practice, statements by high-level dignitaries and groups of States will be moved to the beginning of the list. Each speaker will have two minutes to raise issues and to ask panellists questions. Delegates who have not been able to take the floor due to time constraints will be able to upload their statements on the online system to be posted on the HRC Extranet. Interpretation will be provided in the six United Nations official languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish).

**Accessibility (to be confirmed):** In an effort to render the Human Rights Council more accessible to persons with disabilities and to promote their full participation in the work of the Council on an equal basis with others, this panel discussion will be made accessible to persons with disabilities. During the debate, international sign interpretation and real-time captioning will be provided and webcasted. The accessibility guide to the Human Rights Council for persons with disabilities is available for further information (available at <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/Accessibility.aspx>).

**Background:** Climate change has and will continue to cause or contribute to an increase in the frequency and intensity of both sudden and slow onset events which adversely affect the full enjoyment of a broad range of human rights. Persons with disabilities – an estimated 1 billion individuals worldwide<sup>1</sup> – may experience those impacts differently and more severely than others.<sup>2</sup> Disability covers a diverse array of impairments<sup>3</sup> and results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal barriers, such as stereotypes, stigma and prejudices, and environmental barriers.<sup>4</sup> This hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.<sup>5</sup> People who are culturally, economically, institutionally, politically, socially or otherwise marginalized, such as persons with disabilities, are particularly at risk of harm from the adverse effects of climate change.<sup>6</sup>

The risks to human rights posed by climate change have been documented by the Human Rights Council, its special procedures mechanisms and OHCHR in resolutions,

<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization and the World Bank, World Report on Disability (2011), p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> See A/71/314.

<sup>3</sup> New Earth Disability, "Why climate change and disability?" available at <https://wid.org/2018/09/25/ned-intro/>.

<sup>4</sup> Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, preamble and see Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, general comment No. 6 (2018) on equality and non-discrimination.

<sup>5</sup> Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, preamble.

<sup>6</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability, synthesis report, summary for policymakers.

various reports and activities. The disproportionate harms sometimes experienced by persons with disabilities are also increasingly recognized. Most recently, the Council acknowledged, in its resolution 41/21, the need to support the resilience and adaptive capacities of persons with disabilities to respond to climate change. The Council further highlighted the importance of international cooperation and assistance, in particular to better promote the access of persons with disabilities to livelihoods, food and nutrition, safe drinking water and sanitation, health-care services and medicines, education and training, adequate housing and decent work, clean energy, science and technology.

The call for cooperation and assistance to address the impacts of climate change and to support the resilience and adaptive capacities of persons with disabilities is also found in other legal and policy instruments. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities offers a guiding framework for actions related to persons with disabilities, including the building of inclusive climate change responses and resilience. According to the preamble of the Paris Agreement, States parties should respect, promote and consider their respective human rights obligations, including the rights of persons with disabilities, when addressing climate change. A series of decisions adopted under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change concern persons with disabilities, including decisions related to climate empowerment, adaptation, capacity-building, loss and damage, participation and a shared vision.<sup>7</sup> Human rights principles and standards are strongly reflected in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and persons with disabilities are given special attention under several of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The poor and marginalized are among those worst impacted by both COVID-19 and environmental harms such as climate change and pollution that directly and indirectly threaten the full and effective enjoyment of all human rights. Environmental harms disproportionately impact individuals, groups and peoples already living in vulnerable situations – including persons with disabilities. Crises such as COVID-19 amplify those effects, including through impacts on access to food and land, water and sanitation, housing, livelihoods, decent work, healthcare and other basic necessities. The COVID-19 response must address inequalities and focus on protection of persons in vulnerable situations in order to leave no one behind.

A disability-inclusive human rights-based approach to climate change entails climate action that is inclusive of and accountable to persons with disabilities at all stages. Taking into account the requirements of persons with disabilities is critical for effective climate action and to prevent climate change from exacerbating inequalities. The active, free and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities and their diverse representative organizations at all levels of decision-making and action will empower persons with disabilities as agents of change, prevent discrimination against them and make climate action more effective.

This panel discussion will be informed by the analytical study of OHCHR on the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of climate change ([A/HRC/44/30](#)). It presents an opportunity to develop a more profound understanding of the impacts of climate change on the rights of persons with disabilities and to identify opportunities to implement a disability-inclusive approach to climate action in the context of the adverse impacts of climate change.

**Background documents:**

Human Rights Council resolutions on human rights and climate change:

- [Human Rights Council resolution 41/21](#) of 12 July 2019;
- [Human Rights Council resolution 38/4](#) of 5 July 2018;
- [Human Rights Council resolution 35/20](#) of 22 June 2017;

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<sup>7</sup> Council of Canadians with Disabilities, Inclusiva and Centre for International Environmental Law, “The rights of persons with disabilities in the context of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change: relevant international frameworks and compilation of decisions adopted by the parties to the UNFCCC” (2019).

- [Human Rights Council resolution 32/33](#) of 1 July 2016;
- [Human Rights Council resolution 29/15](#) of 2 July 2015;
- [Human Rights Council resolution 26/27](#) of 27 June 2014;
- [Human Rights Council resolution 18/22](#) of 30 September 2011;
- [Human Rights Council resolution 10/4](#) of 25 March 2009;
- [Human Rights Council resolution 7/23](#) of 28 March 2008.

OHCHR analytical study on the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of climate change (2020): [A/HRC/44/30](#) and [Easy-to-Read version in English](#)