

Side Event on Rural Women and Girls with Disabilities
On The Occasion Of The
56th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women

By Stephanie Ortoleva, Esq.¹

The 56th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in 2012 provides a critical opportunity for strengthening policy guidance and developing concrete and focused recommendations targeted to a number of stakeholders to ensure more sustained and accelerated efforts to empower women and girls with disabilities in rural areas and increase their rate of participation in decision-making processes. This Side Event takes place at a significant time as the international community prepares for the upcoming 23 September 2013 United Nations High Level Meeting on Disability and Development.² The voice and concerns of women and girls with disabilities in rural development should be articulated and clearly integrated into the work of the international community so that the perspective of rural women and girls with disabilities are reflected in any policy decisions made at international, national and local levels. The Side Event is designed to contribute to a full understanding of the issues under discussion at the CSW and to

¹ Stephanie Ortoleva is an attorney with expertise in international human rights law and U.S. civil rights law. She is the Senior Human Rights Legal Advisor with BlueLaw International, LLP, where she focuses on disability rights, women's rights, and rule of law issues, with concentrations on human rights programming in developing, transition, and post-conflict countries, as well as consulting for governments and international organizations, including as a special advisor to the UN on both disability and women's rights. She is the founder and President of Women Enabled (www.WomenEnabled.org) where she advocates to bring attention to the urgent need to include women and girls with disabilities in international resolutions, policies and programs. She is the founding Co-Chair of the American Society of International Law's International Disability Rights Interest Group and is an Adjunct Professor at American University School of International Service. Previously, Ms. Ortoleva served as an Attorney and Human Rights Officer at the U.S. Department of State, where she participated in the negotiations of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, serving on the United States governmental delegation, as well as undertaking extensive work at the United Nations and Organization of American States on international women's issues, including women's role in peace-building and post-conflict resolution. She was given the prestigious U.S. Department of State Franklin Award in 2009 for her outstanding work on human rights matters and was the featured Department employee for women's history month in 2009. She is a frequent speaker at conferences, universities and the UN and other venues and has numerous publications on women's rights, disability rights, and multilateral diplomacy, including a Chapter in *LAWYERS, LEAD ON*, (American Bar Association Publishing, March 2011); *RIGHT NOW! – WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES BUILD PEACE POST-CONFLICT*, Center for Women's Policy Studies (Barbara Waxman Fiduccia Papers, April 2011); with her colleague Marc Brenman, *Corporations & the Human Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, R.I. J. (April 2011); *The Forgotten Peace Builders: Women with Disabilities*, 33 *LOY. L.A. INT'L & COMP. L. REV.* 83 (2010); *Inaccessible Justice: Persons with Disabilities and the Legal System*, 17 *ILSA J. INT'L & COMP. L.* 281 (Spring 2011); *Women's Issues in Transportation*, in *RUNNING ON EMPTY: TRANSPORT, SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND ENVIRONMENT JUSTICE* 257–279 (K. Lucas ed., London: Policy Press, 2004); among others. Ms. Ortoleva serves on the Boards of Directors of the U.S. International Council on Disability and Disability Rights International, she is an active member of the International Network of Women with Disabilities, an on-line community of women with disabilities and allies, and she is the Chair of the National Organization for Women's Global Feminist Committee. She graduated from Hofstra University School of Law with outstanding honors and is admitted to practice before the U.S. Supreme Court and in the State of New York. Ms. Ortoleva can be reached via e-mail at WomenEnabled@gmail.com.

² United Nations, High-level meeting of the General Assembly on disability and development, 23 September 2013, The way forward: a Disability inclusive development agenda towards 2015 and beyond, available at: <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=1590>. In 2011, the General Assembly adopted resolution 66/124, stating that it would convene a one-day high-level meeting of the General Assembly on disability (HLMD) at the level of Heads of State and Government on 23 September 2013, the Monday before the start of the general debate of the sixty-eighth session. The HLMD will be comprised of a plenary meeting and two consecutive informal interactive round tables. Participation in each round table will include Member States, observers and representatives of entities of the United Nations system, civil society and the private sector. The HLMD will result in a concise, action-oriented Outcome Document in support of the aims of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the realization of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals for persons with disabilities.

assist the CSW in its deliberations and development of its Final Conclusions from the session, as well as to contribute to the preparation for the 2013 UN High Level Meeting on Disability and Development. Member States, including Australia and Sweden, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and civil society organizations (including Women enabled, Women with disabilities Australia and the Women's UN report Network) have co-sponsored this Side Event at CSW, which will also include, in person and via video conference, the participation of women with first-hand experience of disability in rural settings.

One women's story fostering change for rural women with disabilities:

“When she was 22, [Kamala] left her parents' home and her village to take a job in the city. It was a huge step for a young woman in Sri Lanka, especially one with a disability. Most girls who have disabilities hardly have an opportunity to finish school, and they rarely receive encouragement to leave their parents' home unless to marry. In the city, the young woman...Kamala struggled to find a landlord willing to rent to a person with a disability and an employer willing to hire one.... Seeking access to public services that would benefit women with disabilities proved to be an incredibly tough struggle for Kamala – at least on her own. ‘Why do we women in Sri Lanka, we who are using wheelchairs, have such difficulty in getting about? Why are there no facilities to help us?’ she was left asking. These were questions not many women asked publicly in 1994. Kamala needed more than answers – she wanted change.... After months of confronting government officials and lobbying on her own for improved public access, Kamala recognized that it would take a chorus of voices to bring about change....[S]he organized a group of women with disabilities from various districts to discuss what could be done. The group...AKASA, a Sinhalese word for “the Heavens,”[the] Association of Women with Disabilities, ... [is] a self-help support group devoted to creating new opportunities for its members. Since its inception, AKASA has evolved into a network of women's groups in the district of Anuradhapura... In small village groups, women with disabilities, who are accustomed to experiencing alienation, have an opportunity to discuss day-to-day issues affecting their lives. The groups offer the women friendships while shared experiences generate moral support. And, in the context of a group, the women help each other find solutions to problems that can range from family relationships to income earning. Through a larger district organization, women connect to training opportunities or financial resources to start businesses.”³

From Kamala's accomplishments in Sri Lanka, we see a replicable example of a best practice for development with rural women with disabilities: Women empowering women through a support network to exercise their rights and to gain access to services, skills training and self-employment.

Title, Dates and Venue

- Title: Rural Women and Girls with Disabilities – Economic Empowerment and Political Participation
- United Nations Commission on the Status of Women 56th Session - 2012
- Location: United Nations Headquarters - North Lawn Building - Conference Room 6
- Date and Time: – Tuesday, 28 February 2012 – 1:15 to 2:30 PM

³ *Women Inspiring Women: A Peer Group in Sri Lanka Improves the Lives of People with Disabilities*, in MOVING FORWARD: TOWARD DECENT WORK FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES – EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICES IN VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT FROM ASIA AND THE PACIFIC 129-136 (Debra A. Perry, eds., Int'l Lab. Org. 2003), available at: http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_bk_pb_89_en.pdf

Panellists for the Side Event on ‘Rural Women with Disabilities’

- Permanent Mission of Sweden to the United Nations - H.E. Mr. Mårten Grunditz, Permanent Representative of Sweden to the United Nations
- Government of Australia - Ms. Elizabeth Broderick, Sex Discrimination Commissioner of Australian Human Rights Commission
- Welcoming Remarks - Akiko Ito, Chief, UN Secretariat for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Elizabeth Broderick, Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Australian Human rights commission and Australian Delegate to CSW
- Moderator – Stephanie Ortoleva, Esq., Senior Human Rights Legal Advisor, BlueLaw International, LLP; Founder and President, WomenEnabled
- Associate Professor Helen Meekosha, University of New South Wales and Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) Board Member
- Ms. Duptho Zam, English Teacher and Performing Artist, Royal Academy of Performing Arts of Bhutan and Disability rights Expert
- Myra Kovary, E-list Moderator, International Network of Women With Disabilities (INWWD)
- Lois A. Herman, Women’s UN Report Network (WUNRN)

Approach & Objectives of the Side event

The 56th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in 2012 provides a critical opportunity for strengthening policy guidance and developing concrete and focused recommendations targeted to a number of stakeholders to ensure more sustained and accelerated efforts to empower women and girls with disabilities in rural areas and increase their rate of participation in decision-making processes. The Side Event is designed to contribute to a full understanding of the issues under discussion and to assist the CSW in its deliberations.

The Side Event will present an overview of the situation of rural women with disabilities and will explore a wide range of strategies that can enhance the empowerment of rural women with disabilities. The following topics will be discussed:

- Explore key strategies to enhance the empowerment and participation of rural women with disabilities, by identifying policies and practices, institutions and means of participation that have proven effective in supporting the empowerment of women and girls with disabilities;
- Identify concrete recommendations for action in support of rural women and girls with disabilities’ empowerment to guide CSW in accelerating the implementation of policy commitments on the ground;
- Provide an opportunity to promote the leadership and participation of women and girls with disabilities in decision-making in international, regional and intergovernmental processes and outcomes;
- Outline applicable international and comparative legal norms;
- Highlight specific issues confronting rural women and girls with disabilities and strategies to address them, such as Stereotyping, Empowerment, Education, Health care, including sexual and reproductive health care, Transportation, hunger and malnutrition, Access to credit, including micro-credit, land ownership and transfer of Property, Payment for farm labour, access to technology to foster efficiency, Access to justice, Impact of Conflict and disaster situations, Violence against women, trafficking in women and sexual exploitation, political and community participation, and Participatory development.

At the 56th session of the Commission on the Status of Women there were ground-breaking examples of leadership by women with disabilities. The Side Event organized by Stephanie Ortoleva of Women Enabled and her advocacy at that session and the representation of Christina Ryan of Women with Disabilities Australia and their representation resulted in tangible outcomes in the working of the CSW 55 Agreed Outcomes.⁴ This Side Event on 'Rural Women With Disabilities' at CSW56 provides an exciting opportunity to build on this previous work and ensure that women and girls with disabilities are included in the CSW 56 Outcome Document. Commission on the Status of Women 56th Session Background & Objectives

In accordance with its multi-year programme of work (2010-2014), the 56th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in 2012 will consider 'The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges' as its priority theme.⁵

UN Women in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the World Food Programme (WFP) convened an expert group meeting (EGM) on 'Enabling rural women's economic empowerment: institutions, opportunities and participation' from 20 to 23 September, 2011 in Accra, Ghana. Of the approximately 15 papers presented at this meeting,⁶ only three of the papers had any references to women and girls with disabilities.

The Expert Meeting Concept Note contained two brief references to women and girls with disabilities. The Concept Note states: "Provision of a social protection floor to provide employment guarantees, income support benefits, basic income security guarantees for the elderly and persons with disabilities, and child benefits can help combat rising inequality and persistent poverty in rural areas."⁷

In addition to recognizing that women and girls with disabilities are also subject to the feminization of poverty, the Expert paper of Zou Xiaojiao of the Committee on the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women noted the urgent need for data on women and girls with disabilities and stated in its recommendations: "Governments shall ... d. collect data, including sex-disaggregated data and measurable indicators, to assess the trends of the situation of rural women in all areas of education, health and employment, and give special attention to the collection of data with respect to the most vulnerable groups of women, such as older women, women with disabilities and indigenous women."⁸

⁴ U.N. Econ. & Soc. Council, Comm'n on the Status of Women, 55th Sess. [CSW 55], *Agreed conclusions on access and participation of women and girls in education, training and science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work*, U.N. Doc. E/CN.6/2011/L.6 (Feb. 22- Mar. 4, 2011).

⁵ 2012 Priority Theme, U.N. Econ. & Soc. Council, Comm'n on the Status of Women, 56th Sess. [CSW 56], available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/56sess.htm>.

⁶ Expert Papers from U.N. Comm'n on the Status of Women Expert Group Meeting 'Enabling rural women's economic empowerment: institutions, opportunities and participation', (Accra, Ghana, Sept. 20-23, 2011)(available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw56/egm.htm>).

⁷ U.N. COMM'N ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN EXPERT GROUP MEETING 'ENABLING RURAL WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT: INSTITUTIONS, OPPORTUNITIES AND PARTICIPATION', CONCEPT NOTE at 8, U.N. Doc. EGM/RW/2011/INF.1 (June 2011), available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw56/egm/Concept-noteFINAL.pdf>.

⁸ Zou Xiaojiao, *Trends in the Implementation of Article 14 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, U.N. Doc. EGM/RW/2011/EP.4 (Sept. 2011), available at

A paper prepared by a collaboration among several groups of women expert on climate change noted that women with disabilities are especially effected by climate change, and, like all women, often have primary responsibility for production of the “world’s staple crops.” The paper also highlighted the importance of effective participation of women with disabilities.⁹

Rationale for the Inclusion of Women with Disabilities in Consideration of the Situation of Rural Women

Women and girls with disabilities are a part of all societies. They need to be an active part of the advancement of the human rights of all and shaping how societies affect their lives. The justifications for inclusion are numerous. Representation and fairness are the most obvious: women account for more than half of the population of the world. There are approximately one billion persons with disabilities in the world, which constitutes 15 percent of the global population¹⁰ this number is increasing due to many factors,¹¹ including natural disasters, which have dramatic impact on rural communities.¹² The World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank (WB) recent (9 June 2011) ground-breaking report entitled “World Report on Disability,” notes a dramatic increase in estimates of the number of persons with disabilities worldwide, stating: About 15% of the world’s population lives with some form of disability, of whom 2-4% experience significant difficulties in functioning. The global disability prevalence is higher than previous WHO estimates, which date from the 1970s and suggested a figure of around 10%. There are significant differences in the prevalence of disability (defined as “significant difficulties in their everyday lives”) between men and women in both developing and more developed countries: male disability prevalence rate is 12% and female disability prevalence rate is 19.2%.¹³ Previous estimates indicated that there are now 325 million women and girls with disabilities in the world, most of who live in rural areas of developing or resource-poor countries.¹⁴ Although significant progress has been made in bringing awareness of and attention to the issues of rural women in human rights treaties, and in intergovernmental outcomes, the United Nations has recognised that more attention needs to be directed to the situation of specific groups of rural women, including women with disabilities.¹⁵

Studies on women with disabilities in rural areas of many countries in the Asian and Pacific region have found that more than 80% of women with disabilities have no independent means of livelihood, and are thus totally dependent on others for their very existence.¹⁶ The myriad of issues that confront women with disabilities are significantly more pronounced in

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw56/egm/Zou-EP-4-EGM-RW-Sep-2011.pdf>.

⁹ Int’l Alliance of Women, Global Gender Climate Alliance, Int’l Council of Women, & Women’s Env. and Dev. Org., *CEDAW, Rural Women and Climate Change*, U.N. Doc. EGM/RW/2011/RP.1 (Sept. 2011), available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw56/egm/IAW-RP-1-EGM-RW-Sep-2011.pdf>.

¹⁰ WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION & WORLD BANK, *WORLD REPORT ON DISABILITY*, xi (2011), available at http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2011/9789240685215_eng.pdf.

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.* at 34.

¹³ *Id.* at 261.

¹⁴ World Bank, *Women with Disability* (2009)(last accessed Oct. 2009), <http://go.worldbank.org/O14DRFLK90>.

¹⁵ U.N. COMM’N ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN EXPERT GROUP MEETING ‘ENABLING RURAL WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT: INSTITUTIONS, OPPORTUNITIES AND PARTICIPATION’, CONCEPT NOTE, U.N. Doc. EGM/RW/2011/INF.1 (June 2011), available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw56/egm/Concept-noteFINAL.pdf>.

¹⁶ U.N. ESCAP Workshop on Women and Disability: Promoting Full Participation of Women with Disabilities in the Process of Elaboration on an International Convention to Promote and Protect the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities, *Final Report*, Bangkok, Thai., Aug. 18-22, 2003, available at www.wvda.org.au/unescapwwd1.doc.

rural areas due to inaccessible environments and lack of services, lack of information, awareness, education, income, and contact resulting in extreme isolation and invisibility.¹⁷

Legal and Policy Basis for Inclusion

The recommendation for the inclusion of issues of concern to rural women and girls with disabilities in the work of the 56th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women is drawn from and is consistent with the gender-sensitive, disability-inclusive approaches outlined in the United Nations Charter,¹⁸ and consistent with the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), especially its Article 6 on Women with Disabilities,¹⁹ the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), especially its Article 14²⁰ and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).²¹

The 1995 Beijing Declaration clearly recognized the need to address the concerns of women with disabilities and the correlated need to include women with disabilities in decision making, stating that Governments should:

Strengthen and encourage the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, paying special attention to ensure non-discrimination and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by women and girls with disabilities, including their access to information and services in the field of violence against women, as well as their active participation in and economic contribution to all aspects of society.²²

Drawing on the disability-inclusive nature of the original Beijing Declaration itself, the 2000 Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly, reviewing the progress of the outcomes of the Fourth World Conference on Women, also addressed the concerns and role of women with disabilities by indicating that Governments should:

Adopt and promote a holistic approach to respond to all forms of violence and abuse against girls and women of all ages, including girls and women with disabilities, as well as vulnerable and marginalized women and girls in order to address their diverse needs, including education, provision of appropriate health care and services and basic social services.²³

Furthermore, it also stated that Governments should:

Design and implement policies and programmes to address fully specific needs of women and girls with disabilities, to ensure their equal access to education at all levels, including

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ U.N. Charter (1945), available at <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/index.shtml>.

¹⁹ See Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, G.A. Res. 61/611, art. 6, 7, 8(1)(b), 9, 12, 13, 16, 19, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 31, U.N. Doc. A/RES/61/611 (Dec. 6, 2006) [hereinafter CRPD], available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm>.

²⁰ See, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, G.A. Res. 34/180, art. 14, U.N. Doc. A/RES/34/180 (Dec. 18, 1979) [hereinafter CEDAW], available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm>.

²¹ Convention on the Rights of the Child, G.A. Res. 44/25, U.N. Doc. A/RES/44/25 (Nov. 20, 1989) [hereinafter CRC] (Article 23 of the CRC recognizes the special needs of disabled children and specifically calls on the community to make the necessary accommodations so that disabled children are fully integrated into society and can enjoy a fair and decent life.), available at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/pdf/crc.pdf>.

²² Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, P.R.C., Sept. 4-15, 1995, *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, ¶ 232(p), available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf>.

²³ G.A. Res. S-23/3, ¶ 69(j), U.N. Doc. A/RES/S-23/3 (Nov. 16, 2000).

technical and vocational training and adequate rehabilitation programmes, health care and services and employment opportunities, to protect and promote their human rights and, where appropriate, to eliminate existing inequalities between women and men with disabilities.²⁴

This Concept Note also takes into consideration the joint statement of commitment of the inter-agency support group for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (IASG),²⁵ which was established by the United Nations Chief Executives Board in 2006, with the purpose of “demonstrating our will to ensure the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities by working towards the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in the work of the United Nations.”²⁶ Furthermore, the UN interagency network on women and gender equality (IANWGE) also reinforces the concept of gender inclusion within the United Nations.²⁷

The United Nations General Assembly has over the last few years issued a series of resolutions, especially Resolutions A/65/186 and A/64/131,²⁸ calling for the mainstreaming of persons with disabilities in development, and has specifically called upon Governments to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women with disabilities

The CEDAW Committee increasingly has addressed the concerns of women and girls with disabilities in its General Recommendations. In General Recommendation Number 18, issued in 1991, the CEDAW Committee called for special attention to be paid to the double discrimination women with disabilities face and “[r]ecommends that State parties provide information on disabled women in their periodic reports, and on measures taken to deal with their particular situation, including special measures to ensure that they have equal access to education and employment, health services and social security, and to ensure that they can participate in all areas of social and cultural life.”²⁹ In General Recommendation Number 24, issued in 1999, the CEDAW Committee also referenced issues of concern to women with disabilities. The CEDAW Committee recognized that societal factors may be “determinative of health status” and that “special attention should be given to health needs and rights of women” with disabilities, among other vulnerable groups.³⁰

²⁴ *Id.* At ¶ 83(d).

²⁵ United Nations Enable, Inter-Agency Support Group, <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?navid=43&pid=323> (last visited July 28, 2010). The IASG was created to ensure “the commitment to the internationally agreed development goals; the need for system-wide coherence within the ‘delivering as one’ framework; the importance of inclusion of persons with disabilities in the work of the United Nations; the need for a participatory approach; and the role of the United Nations in supporting Member States and specifically States parties.” The IASG includes many UN entities, including the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) all of which work on the issues raised in this paper.

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/ianwge/index.html> (last visited Mar. 28, 2011). The IANWGE was created to champion for gender equality throughout the programs, resolutions and goals of the UN bodies and to support and monitor the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and other gender related recommendations pertaining to the UN system. The IANWGE is comprised of many UN entities, including the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), World Health Organization (WHO), and the World Bank (WB).

²⁸ Realizing the Millennium Development Goals for Persons with Disabilities Towards 2015 and Beyond, G.A. Res. 65/186, U.N. GAOR, 65th Sess., 71st plen. mtg., U.N. Doc. A/RES/65/186 (Dec. 21, 2010), available at: <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=36>; Realizing the Millennium Development Goals for Persons with Disabilities, G.A. Res. 64/131, U.N. GAOR, 64th Sess., 65th plen. mtg., U.N. Doc. A/RES/64/131 (Dec. 18, 2009), available at: <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=36>.

²⁹ Comm. on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, *General Recommendation 18*, available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations/recomm.htm#recom18>.

³⁰ Comm. on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, *General Recommendation 24*, available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations/recomm.htm#recom24>.

More recently, CEDAW Committee General Recommendation Numbers 27 and 28 also specifically mention women with disabilities. General Recommendation Number 27, issued in 2010, pertains to the protection of the human rights of older women and addresses women with disabilities by discussing the double discrimination and gender stereotyping older women with disabilities face, especially in regards to their access to education, healthcare services, legal services and their increased susceptibility to violence.³¹ General Recommendation Number 28, also issued in 2010, focuses on the core obligations of States parties under Article 2 of the CEDAW and discusses the enhanced vulnerability for discrimination women with disabilities face in civil and penal laws, regulations and customary laws and practice.³²

The CEDAW Committee, in preparation for the 56th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, has issued a General Statement on rural women,³³ addressing various issues that impact the lives of rural women. With respect to women and girls with disabilities, the CEDAW Committee wrote in its section on recommendations: “developing strategies to address the special needs of older women as well as disabled women and the indigenous women living in rural areas who often suffer a severe lack of basic resources for subsistence, income security, access to health care, information on and enjoyment of their entitlements and rights.”³⁴

In 2007, in the Declaration of the Fourth World Congress of Rural Women, the concerns of rural women and girls with disabilities were highlighted, especially with respect to education opportunities in paragraph 12 of the Declaration, stating: “Adopt affirmative measures including scholarships at all levels for female students in rural areas, promote non-formal education and literacy programmes for rural women, including women with disabilities.”³⁵

The leading study, *Pacific Sisters with Disabilities: at the Intersection of Discrimination*, explores the issues and challenges faced by women and girls with disabilities in the Pacific Region and analyzes social and economic factors impacting on their human rights, documented through comprehensive statistical data. The situation of rural women and girls with disabilities is highlighted in the Report as having even more severe ramifications for low levels of education, employment, health care and other aspects of women’s lives as well as increased levels of gender-based violence.³⁶

³¹ Comm. on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, *General Recommendation 27*, U.N. Doc. CEDAW/C/GC/27 (Dec. 16, 2010), available at <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G10/472/53/PDF/G1047253.pdf?OpenElement>.

³² Comm. on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, *General Recommendation 28*, U.N. Doc. CEDAW/C/GC/28 (Dec. 16, 2010), available at <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G10/472/60/PDF/G1047260.pdf?OpenElement>.

³³ Comm. on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 50th Sess., *General Statement on Rural Women* (Oct. 19, 2011), available at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/statements/StatementRuralWomen.pdf>. Note especially the CEDAW’s discussion of numerous issues that impact the lives of rural women and which have a greater impact on rural women and girls with disabilities due to the double discrimination they face because of their gender and disability. These issues include but are not limited to: education, health, access to resources and opportunities for skill building, land ownership, employment opportunities and payment for their generally unpaid labor, access to credit, food security and access to water, opportunities to engage in farming and own land, failure of development programs to include a gender focus, access to communication technology, impact of war, conflict and natural disasters, violence against women, trafficking in women and sexual exploitation and forced labor, rural women’s participation as critical agents of development, political empowerment, access to justice, and the impact of negative stereotypes.

³⁴ *Id.* at 5.

³⁵ Fourth World Congress of Rural Women, Durban, South Africa, Apr. 23-25, 2007, *Declaration of the Fourth World Congress of Rural Women* (Apr. 27, 2007), available at http://www.nda.agric.za/docs/WCRW/declaration_wcrw.pdf.

³⁶ Daniel Stubbs & Sainimili Tawake, *PACIFIC SISTERS WITH DISABILITIES: AT THE INTERSECTION OF DISCRIMINATION*, (UNDP Pacific Centre, Apr. 2009), available at <http://www.undppc.org.fj/resources/article/files/Final%20PSWD%20BOOKLET.pdf>.

Although there has been progress in women's participation in decision-making globally, the representation of women with disabilities (including those from rural areas) in political and public life remains negligible in most societies. In some areas, discriminatory and traditional attitudes and practices at the local level limit the space for participation of women with disabilities in political and economic decision-making within their communities.³⁷

Co-Sponsors & Organizers of the Side Event on Rural Women with Disabilities

Secretariat for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (SCRPD/DSPD/DESA)³⁸, will co-sponsor the proposed Side Event at CSW56 on 'Rural Women with Disabilities'. Ms. Akiko Ito, chief, SCRPD/DSPD/DESA, has advised that a thematic focus for the CRPD Secretariat this coming year is on persons with disabilities from rural communities.

Women Enabled,³⁹ Women with Disabilities Australia (WWDA), and the Women's UN Report Network (WUNRN)⁴⁰, are working collaboratively to plan the Event along with the UN Secretariat on the Convention on the rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Recognizing the extraordinary opportunity this proposed event presents, the Australian Government and Permanent Mission of Sweden to the United Nations will co-sponsor the Side Event on Rural Women with Disabilities. Both Governments are demonstrating significant leadership internationally in their policy initiatives for people with disabilities, and this Side Event at CSW56 will provide an outstanding opportunity for the Australian Government and the Permanent Mission of Sweden to showcase some of this work.

About the Speakers of the Side Event on Rural Women with Disabilities

- Akiko Ito serves as the Chief of the Secretariat for the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and is the UN/Focal Point on Disability.
- Elizabeth Broderick, Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Australian Human rights commission
- H.E. Mr. Mårten Grunditz, Permanent Representative of Sweden to the United Nations
- Stephanie Ortoleva is a recognized and published author and researcher on issues of women's rights and the rights of women with disabilities. She is the Senior Human Rights Legal Advisor at BlueLaw International and is the Founder and President of WomenEnabled, an education and advocacy project to bring attention to the urgent need to advocate for the human rights of all women and girls and to include women and girls with disabilities in international resolutions, policies and programs addressing women's human rights and development. She has numerous scholarly publications, including "Inaccessible Justice: Persons with Disabilities and the Legal System," "The Forgotten Peace Builders: Women with Disabilities," as well as several papers prepared for the United Nations, such as "Recommendations to the Committee on the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women to include women and girls with disabilities as the Committee elaborates a "General Recommendation on Women in

³⁷ UN Women et al (2011) OpCit.

³⁸ See <http://social.un.org/index/Disability.aspx>; <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?navid=3&pid=17>.

³⁹ See <http://www.WomenEnabled.org>.

⁴⁰ See <http://www.wunrn.com>.

Conflict and Post-conflict Situations”." Ms. Ortoleva received her J.D. from Hofstra University School of Law with academic honors.

- Professor Helen Meekosha (UNSW), a long-serving member of WWDA, is currently undertaking a research study ‘Disability in Rural Australia’ - a Discovery Grant funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC). The study brings together gender, disability and rurality; explores the experience of Indigeneity and disability; focuses on an unexplored area across the social sciences; and privileges the voices of disabled women. This ground-breaking research is particularly timely in the context of the CSW56 theme for 2012 and would be discussed in Professor Meekosha’s presentation. WWDA is seen internationally as a leader in the field of gender and disability.
- Duptho Zam, English Teacher and Performing Artist, Royal Academy of Performing Arts of Bhutan and Disability rights Expert from a rural community in Bhutan.
- Lois A. Herman is Founder-Coordinator of the WUNRN - Women's UN Report Network. WUNRN, based on a UN Study, addresses the human rights, oppression, and empowerment of women and girls all over the world. WUNRN is considered one of the largest global gender research and information programs. The WUNRN ListServe goes throughout the UN System, and to Governments, Embassies & Missions, Academia, NGO's, Religious institutions, Associations, Foundations, Media, Private Sector, Civil Society, and more. Ms. Herman is an internationally respected Gender Specialist and presents regularly at the UN in Geneva, New York, and Rome. Ms. Herman's family has a history of multiple disability issues and she has integrated the concerns of women and girls with disabilities into her work at WUNRN.
- Myra Kovary has been a disability rights activist in her local community in Ithaca, New York, USA for over 30 years and at the international level for the last 10 years. She is the moderator of the International Network of Women with Disabilities Forum. As a member of MindFreedom International, she served as a UN representative to the Ad Hoc Committee during the negotiations of the text of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. She was one of the founding board members of the Center for the Human Rights of Users and Survivors of Psychiatry. She co-founded the Mental Patients Alliance of Central New York in Ithaca in 1980 and served on the Tompkins County Mental Health Board from 1980 - 1986. She was also as a member of the board of the Mental Health Association in Tompkins County from 1980 – 2002, serving in various capacities including as chair of the Advocacy Committee, chair of the Crisis Hostel Committee, and President of the Board. She is a member of the Ithaca Mental Patients Advocacy Coalition. She currently serves on the board of the Finger Lakes Independence Center. She is a professional classical harpist and harp teacher and also holds a Masters degree in Landscape Architecture from Cornell University.
- Other bios to be added as necessary