Statement at the Opening of the 26 session of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

7 March 2022

Dear members of the Committee, UN agencies and fellow members of non-profit and civil society organizations,

My name is Virginia Ossana. I work at Women Enabled International (or WEI for short), a non-profit organization that works to advance human rights at the intersection of gender and disability worldwide. WEI appreciates the opportunity to highlight issues of importance at this intersection before the Committee and would like to support the Committee’s statement on the situation in Ukraine.

First, we would like to highlight the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on persons with disabilities, particularly women, girls. and gender non-conforming persons. WEI together with UNFPA and eight regional and national partners around the world conducted a global study on the impact of the pandemic on this population and we found that this population:

a) is facing increased barriers to accessing healthcare, including exercising sexual and reproductive rights;

b) is experiencing a higher risk of gender-based violence;

c) is facing increased barriers to related rights, including disability support, education and work, and

d) is experiencing a similar impact across the world.

In light of these findings, WEI and our partners created [five tools](https://womenenabled.org/wei-responds-to-the-covid-19-pandemic/) to ensure response this and future crises are inclusive of gender and disability. We will share those with you via the chat box in a minute and we hope you will find them useful.

Secondly, we would like to bring attention to the fact that women and gender minorities with disabilities are still facing challenges participating fully in the movement for gender equality due to accessibility barriers. This was clearly illustrated last year during the Generation Equality Forum, particularly at the Paris Forum. People with disabilities struggled to participate given that the virtual platform was not screen-reader friendly, there were no CART services provided, and sign language interpretation was only provided at the opening, closing, and one disability-focused event. As leaders of the Generation Equality Forum Action Coalition on Feminist Movements and Leadership, WEI, together with the Inclusive Generation Equality Collective - a group of over 150 feminists with disabilities and those advocating at the gender/disability intersection - implemented initiatives to call attention to this shortcoming and rallied States, foundations, private sector actors, and civil society partners around accessibility and inclusivity, including through an open letter to UN Women and France.

In this context, we kindly ask the Committee to consider these issues to ensure that:

1. in situations of crisis, including the COVID-19 pandemic and current armed conflicts, persons with disabilities, particularly women, girls, and gender minorities with disabilities, are prioritized in the response, and that
2. women, girls and gender minorities with disabilities have an accessible seat at the table where our rights are being discussed and decided.

Additionally, given that during this 26th session the Committee will consider its draft general comment on the right to work and employment, its draft joint statement CRC-CRPD on the rights of children with disabilities, and its draft guidelines on deinstitutionalization, we ask the Committee to guarantee these documents include a gender perspective to ensure the rights of women, girls, and gender minorities with disabilities.

Thank you very much.