

CONCEPT NOTE

Side Event at the 14th COSP, 15 - 17 June 2021

Representation matters!

Deaf Members on the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

under the overarching theme

Building back better: COVID-19 response and recovery; Meeting the needs, Realizing the rights and Addressing the socio-economic impacts on persons with disabilities.

Date and time: Wednesday, 16 June, 8:30 – 9:45 (EDT) / 14:30 – 15:45 (CET)

Organisers: Permanent Mission of Austria to the UN, World Federation of the Deaf, Light for the World

Co-Sponsors: International Disability Alliance, #EqualWorld Campaign, Permanent Mission of Ghana to the UN

Format: Online panel discussion with audience, Q&A

Platform: Virtual via Zoom, hosted by Light for the World. [Link to register:](https://bit.ly/3wKXWj2)
<https://bit.ly/3wKXWj2>

Accessibility: Simultaneous ISL interpretation and CART, provided by Light for the World

Summary

To meet the needs and realise the rights of all persons with disabilities, representation is crucial. This is even more relevant in the context of global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences on economic, social, and civil rights. There are over 70 Million Deaf persons worldwide. Yet, there is currently no Deaf member among the independent experts on the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Neither has there been one in the first ten years of the Committee. This trend of a lack of deaf representation limits the functioning of the UN Disability Rights Architecture. Representation matters, indeed. This Side Event will raise the issue of Deaf exclusion on the Committee and present experiences with successful campaigns to change representation at this level.

Objectives of the Side Event

By the end of the session, the audience will

- Be aware of the role, functioning and need for Deaf representation at the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- Be empowered to act together with State Parties to address the lack of representation at upcoming elections to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Draft Agenda

- **Opening words** by the Permanent Representative of Austria to the UN
- **Thematic introduction** by the moderator
- **Contributions** by the panellists
- **Interaction** with the audience

Speakers

Speakers will provide different perspectives and experiences on the topic of the Side Event. The final composition of speakers will be gender-balanced and reflect geographic diversity.

- Ms Gertrude OFORIWA FEFOAME, Global Advocacy Advisor for Social Inclusion, Sightsavers, and Member, UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Ghana.
- Ms María SOLEDAD CISTERNAS REYES, Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility, Chile.
- Dr Joseph MURRAY, President, World Federation of the Deaf, USA.
- Mr Dmitry REBROV, Former Member of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Russia.

Moderator

- Mr Ambrose MURANGIRA, Disability Inclusion Advisor, Light for the World, Uganda.

Background

The UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is an essential part of the UN Disability Rights Architecture. It reviews national implementation of the CRPD and drafts General Comments. It also accompanies the global response to build back better after the COVID-19 pandemic, providing relevant guidance from the perspective of disability rights and inclusion of all in the response and recovery.

The Committee has 18 members, half of which are elected every two years for a four-year term. Currently, there is no Deaf member on the Committee. For the last election at the 13th COSP in 2020, there was also no Deaf candidate for the Committee.

There are over 70 million Deaf people worldwide. They are rarely given the opportunity to partake in governance and decision-making, even when it affects them directly. The Committee would be the best place to address this situation on a global level. However, without representation of Deaf members on the Committee, this role is difficult to fulfil.

This is not the first time that the membership of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities does not reflect the diversity and composition of the people it is meant to represent. The Committee has only seen one deaf member in its history (in 15 years). Furthermore, after the 2016 elections, just one woman was left on the Committee, despite the fact that the majority of persons with disabilities worldwide is female. Subsequently, a global campaign by State Parties, Organisations of Persons with Disabilities and Non-Governmental Organisations called for a gender-balanced representation in the Committee. Following the 2020 elections, 11 members of the Committee are female.

Guiding questions for this Side Event can include:

- Why is representation of Deaf people on the Committee essential for its function and its impact? Why is it important?
- There have been successful campaigns to advocate gender equality at the Committee. What can be learned from the successful campaign for gender equality?
- What can State Parties do to address the situation in the coming years and to ensure that deaf people are represented on the Committee?