

Statement on the discrimination by the United Nations concerning accessibility to information and communication

2026-03-04

The statement released by the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD Committee) in February 2026 revealed that the UN notified the CRPD Committee in January 2026 that they could not provide mandated accessibility services, such as International Sign interpretation and captioning, due to the financial situation of the UN. It was the abrupt notification right before the 34th session opening on March 9 through March 27 in Geneva.

The CRPD Committee is a body of independent experts that monitors implementation of the Convention by the States Parties. With an aim to implement an inclusive society, the Committee has advocated for the human rights of all persons with disabilities, and has provided recommendations to support the implementation of the provisions enshrined in the Convention.

Mr. Hiroshi Tamon, elected from Japan as a deaf member of the CRPD Committee, has attended the sessions and meetings since January 2025. Grounded on the same reason raised in the notification in January 2026, the United Nations considered sign language interpretation as a personal assistant and has provided Mr. Tamon allowances that meet fifty percent of expenses for one sign language interpreter, while sign language interpretation and captioning are essential for the work of Mr. Tamon as a member of the CRPD Committee. It is obvious that the allowance is extremely insufficient, as two sign language interpreters are needed at a minimum during a session. Support from grant organizations and donations called by Japan Disability Forum (JDF) have paid for the shortage, but were not enough, thus Mr. Tamon has personally paid the rest.

Despite repeated requests for reasonable accommodations from many international and national disabled people's organizations (DPOs), including World Federation of the Deaf (WFD), International Disability Alliance (IDA), JDF, and our Japanese Federation of the Deaf, the United Nations sent a disappointing notification in January 2026.

Under such a situation, it is quite unacceptable and unreasonable to force the deaf committee member to pay the expenses for three International Sign interpreters and captioning needed for the session at his own cost, and against the principle of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The statement by the CRPD Committee led to a series of further statements and requests from WFD, IDA, JDF, and other disabled people's organizations, and the United Nations turned its decision and released an announcement that they would provide accessibility services.

The United Nations Charters defines one of the purposes of the United Nations as "to achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or

humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion” (Article 1, Section 3). We have to say that the United Nations underestimates the Charters, by excluding deaf and hard of hearing people from UN sessions and meetings, denying to ensure access to information and communication they need during the sessions and meetings, and reversing its decision in response to statements and demands from DPOs. The role of the United Nations is to call for the state parties to implement the Convention. If the UN gives up providing reasonable accommodation, this is a seriously troubling double standard, ruining universal human rights and its trustfulness that the United Nations has advocated.

Ensuring access to information and communication is not only for deaf and hard of hearing people, but also needed for hearing people. It is our right to access all the information and to communicate through the language we prefer.

The United Nations is the body to advocate for human rights. When it gives up on protecting the right to access information and communication, this is the direct discrimination committed by the United Nations itself, by excluding deaf and hard of hearing people from participating in international society.

Withholding access to information and communication means incapacitating the CRPD Committee members in completing their mission, leading to the incapacitation of the Committee. It will be skeptical that the concluding observations drafted under such circumstances are convincing and credible enough.

When the United Nations decides to cut down access to information and communication first because of the financial difficulties, it is equivalent to announcing the United Nations will leave persons with disabilities behind first in an extraordinary situation. This is the constructed barrier that precludes persons with disabilities from countries without sufficient financial resources and support systems, and Mr. Tamon has faced it by being forced to rely on a large amount of his own expenses and donations. This destabilizes the diversity and fairness in the Committee.

A series of responses by the United Nations proves that their initial notification was based on their lower priority in ensuring access to information and communication rather than the financial issues beyond its control. Access to information and communication is not charity nor voluntary service, but the right that is essential for participation in every field in society. The act to remove this right for financial reasons prevails deplorable message to the world.

Returning to the spirit of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, “Nothing about Us without Us,” Japanese Federation of the Deaf strongly requests the United Nations for ensuring permanent and unwavering budget for access to information and communication.