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'Unprecedented' conference on rights of persons with disabilities gets under way at the United Nations

Participants at the Fifth Session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. UN Photo/Evan Schneider

13 June – A major intergovernmental meeting got underway at the United Nations today, bringing together a wide range of stakeholders to ensure the full implementation of a landmark treaty on the rights of persons with disabilities.

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A major intergovernmental meeting got underway at the United Nations today, bringing together a wide range of stakeholders to ensure the full implementation of a landmark treaty on the rights of persons with disabilities.

“The Convention [on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, or CRPD] is one of the most progressive human rights treaties, recognizing the role of the people it is trying to impact,” Georgi

Panayotov, the Permanent Representative of Bulgaria to the UN and the President of the 10th session of the Conference of States Parties to CRPD, said at a press conference today at the UN Headquarters in New York.

“This is the beginning of the second decade of the CRPD, in the first decade it saw nearly universal ratification [and now] we will have to achieve universal ratification,” added Theresa Degener, the Chair of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – a body of independent UN human rights experts who monitor the implementation of the Convention by its states parties – calling on all stakeholders to protect the normative standard set by the Convention.



Upholding these normative standards and ensuring legal capacity, institutionalization, medical treatment, as well as laws and policies to ensure non-discrimination and full participation of all persons with disabilities are extremely important, she highlighted.

In the same vein, Collin Allen, the Chair of International Disability Alliance, expressed commitment on behalf of organizations of persons with disabilities to work with governments and States parties on the implementation of the Convention.

“We want to ensure that persons with disabilities are heard, and most importantly, involved so that we have meaningful participation and full inclusion,” he said, assisted by sign-language interpreter.

“When we say – nothing about us, without us – it is very significant,” he added, recalling the major achievements of the CRPD over the last decade and highlighting that persons with disabilities “as the experts” on the issue are critical to realizing the aspirations of the Convention.

Held under the theme of 'inclusion and full participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in the implementation of the Convention,' the current session of the Conference of the States Parties will also discuss addressing the impact of multiple discrimination on persons with disabilities and promoting their participation for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in line with CRPD.

It will also seek to ensure inclusion and full participation of persons with disabilities in humanitarian action, as well as promoting inclusive urban development and implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

Also speaking today, Catalina Devandas Aguilar, the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities termed the Conference as an “unprecedented” one and hailed the efforts of its bureau to ensure that has full and direct participation of persons with disabilities.

However, she also expressed concern over the lack of accurate and complete data on persons with disabilities, calling for a clear recommendation on ensuring disaggregated data as well as methodology to collect it.

“Without baseline data, we will not be able to measure any impact of important tools [such as the SDGs and CRPD on] advancing the cause of persons with disabilities,” said the Special Rapporteur.

Special Rapporteurs are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

'Security vacuum' in Central Africa may be exploited by armed groups – UN envoy

13 June – The United Nations envoy for Central Africa today expressed his concern that the withdrawal of troops from the regional force by some contributing countries would create a security vacuum that may be exploited by an armed group.

“The continued threat by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) to regional stability should not be underestimated, in particular as the Ugandan and the South Sudanese forces have now disengaged from the African Union Regional Task Force (RTF), along with the United States special forces,” François Loucény Fall, the Special Representative and head of the UN Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), told the Security Council.

He explained that the Central African Republic national security forces, which could in the long run fill the gap left by the exit of the



Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the UN Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), François Loucény Fall, addresses the Security Council. UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

Ugandan forces, still require training and structural reforms. And the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the country, known by its French acronym MINUSCA, is not mandated to conduct anti-LRA military operations.

Any training efforts would need to be in line with the overall security sector reform process and coordinated with other partners supporting the Central African armed forces, he added.

“Collectively, there is a need to remain focused on efforts aimed at the total eradication of the LRA,” he said, stressing that UNOCA will remain engaged, including by reviewing the UN regional strategy to address the threat and impact of the LRA, and ensuring coordination among the various stakeholders working on the issue.

His semi-annual briefing also touched on political tensions that have persisted in some Central African countries, mostly related to recent or future electoral processes, including Gabon and the Republic of the Congo.

As for Lake Chad Basin, he said that the activities of the Boko Haram terrorist group have undermined development and exacerbated economic hardship in the region. Boko Haram remains a serious threat to regional stability despite the military progress achieved by the Multi-national Joint Task Force (MNJTF) against the terrorist group.

In conclusion, he called for a strong commitment of the Security Council to the promotion of peace and security in Central Africa.

Mine action vital to success of UN peace mandates, Security Council told



Mine clearance in Timbuktu, Mali. Photo: MINUSMA/Marco Dormino

13 June – The mitigation of the threats posed by landmines and other explosive remnants of war is vital to the success of United Nations peacekeeping and special political missions, as well as to the delivery of humanitarian assistance, the return of displaced persons, and sustainable development, a senior UN official told the Security Council today.

“As an integrated component of peacekeeping and special political missions, mine action is critical to the safety, security and mobility of mission personnel and to effective and efficient mandate implementation along with its critical importance for protection of civilian populations, especially children and women,” said Alexander Zuev, Assistant Secretary-General for Rule of Law and Security Institutions, Department of Peacekeeping Operations, during a thematic debate.

The debate, titled 'Comprehensive Approach to Mine Action and Explosive Hazards Mitigation,' was proposed by Bolivia, which holds the Council's presidency for the month. Explosive hazards have been a key concern, especially for troop contributing countries. Nathalie Ochoa Nina, of the UN Mine Action Service in Colombia also addressed the meeting.

Explaining how mine action contributes to UN activities on the ground, Mr. Zuev said that, for example, in Iraq, risk education campaigns and humanitarian clearance of improvised explosive devices allows the safe return of displaced populations and delivery of humanitarian assistance. In South Sudan, the use of explosive detection dogs ensures that the sites sheltering civilians are free from explosive hazards, he added.

He went on to explain how the destruction of anti-personnel mines, explosive remnants of war and improvised explosive devices is vital to conflict prevention because those explosive materials could be "recycled" to construct new improvised explosive devices.

He also said that employing former soldiers in the field of mine clearance could help create conditions conducive to peace.

UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) is also coordinating development of standards for the disposal of improvised explosive devices. These standards, expected to be completed by the 72nd session of the General Assembly, will ensure conformity in training, equipment and operations, Mr. Zuev said.

Protection of migrant and refugee children must be at core of new global compacts – UN agency

13 June – Amid ongoing discussions towards the first-ever global compacts on refugees and migration, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) joined other United Nations agencies meeting in Berlin today stressing that all parties involved in these talks must work together to address the needs of migrant children, consistent with their human rights.

“Every day at [IOM], we work with migrant children. Some have been compelled to move accompanied by relatives or guardians or on their own due to conflict, disasters, fear and despair,” said William Lacy Swing, IOM Director General, when discussing preparations for the Global Conference on Children on the Move.

He explained that other children migrate in search of better socio-educational opportunities and ultimately to pursue their own development and that of the society they live in.

With more than 250 participants from States, civil society, academia, UN agencies, private sector and individual experts, the conference takes into account children's priorities and concerns, with the aim of assuring separate global compacts covering migrants and refugees.

“We want to ensure that child migration is always in the best interests of the child and that when it is not, sustainable solutions are found for children and their families both at home or in a new home elsewhere. These solutions should ensure that children are not left behind and that they are not exploited or even worse: trafficked. All migrant children are entitled to care and protection regardless of their migratory status,” concluded Mr. Swing.

In the New York Declaration Refugees and Migrants, adopted in September 2016, the UN General Assembly decided to develop a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration. The process to develop this global compact for migration started in April 2017. The Assembly will then hold an intergovernmental conference on international migration in 2018 with a view to adopting the global compact.

Different factors contribute to migrant children's situations of vulnerability, including their age, risk factors at individual, household, community and structural levels, the reasons why they have migrated, and the conditions they face during travel, transit, and at destination.

IOM underscores that it will continue to strive for migrant children's wellbeing and best interests across the wide spectrum of activities the Organization is pursuing in support to all Governments, who are ultimately responsible for their protection.

The UN migration agency values this inclusive partnership and its goals, especially as the consultations progress for the global compact on safe, orderly and regular migration – a major global process, to which IOM is extending technical and policy expertise as requested by UN Member States.



This two-year old girl along with her mother and brother, walked for 125km in Somalia in search of water and food. Her father and three other siblings were left with relatives along the way as they were too weak to continue. Photo: Muse Mohammed/IOM

Polluted environments kill 1.4 million in Europe annually; UN agencies urge stepped-up action

13 June – As some 1.4 million people in Europe and Central Asia die prematurely each year from polluted environments, United Nations agency heads at high-level meeting call for regional leaders to scale up action to stem environmental deaths and diseases.

“In the era of Sustainable Development, we can prevent the 1.4 million environment related deaths by making health a political choice across all government sectors,” said Dr. Zsuzsanna Jakab, World Health Organization Regional Director for Europe (WHO/Europe), at the opening of the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health in Ostrava, Czech Republic.

European citizens annually lose 50 million years of healthy life due to environmental risks, corresponding to at least 15 per cent of Europe's total deaths – around half of which are due to outdoor and indoor air pollution.

“We urge all European leaders to take this opportunity for more sustainable policies to address the health challenges of the 21st century,” he underscored.

WHO/Europe, the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), joined approximately 500 representatives from the 53 countries of the European Region together with international and non-governmental organizations, to commit to prioritizing action on environmental risks to health.

“We have enough evidence. We have solutions at hand. What we need is action,” agreed Olga Algayerova, Executive Secretary of UNECE. “Examples of solutions developed over the past 20 years by UNECE and WHO/Europe with a proven track record include the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution, the Protocol on Water and Health and the joint Programme on Transport, Health and Environment. But we must do more to fulfil their potential to clean the air and water and promote smart cities and clean transport systems. And while doing more, we must build on the synergies embedded in the Sustainable Development Goals.”

Environment-related non-communicable diseases

Environmental risk factors are responsible for around 26 per cent of ischemic heart disease, 25 per cent of strokes and 17 per cent of cancers in Europe. Cardiovascular deaths and diseases from environmental exposures are three times higher in low and middle income countries than in high income ones.

Air pollution is Europe's leading environmental killer, responsible for 620,000 deaths every year from both outdoor and indoor exposure.

“Successful cooperation among UNECE member States has led to significant reductions of air pollution in the region – thereby saving lives,” stressed Ms. Algayerova. “All recent studies show that this work needs to continue and be strengthened, and lessons learned should be shared with other regions,” she added.

Other environmental factors, such as chemical pollution, occupational risks and unsafe water and sanitation account for more deaths and diseases and road traffic injuries kill 85,000 people per year.

Extreme weather events from climate change, rapid urbanization and unprecedented levels of migration further exacerbate Europeans' health.



Air pollution from an old coal-fired power plant in Kosovo. Photo: World Bank/Lundrim Aliu

Investing in cities

By 2030, eight out of 10 Europeans will be living in cities, making them one of the main priorities in Europe's agenda at the Ministerial Conference.

A new WHO report, *Environment and health for European Cities in the 21st century: making a difference*, developed jointly with UNECE and UNEP, makes the case for investing in cities to improve people's health and reduce inequalities.

The Environment and Health Ministerial Conference in Ostrava, organized by WHO/Europe, in partnership with UNECE and UNEP is hosted by the Czech Republic and runs until 15 June.

Conflict in Ukraine enters fourth year 'with no end in sight' – UN report



The bomb shelter at the school in the village of Hranitne, which is located along the 'contact line' that divides Government and non-Government controlled areas where fighting is most severe, eastern Ukraine. UNICEF/Kozalov

13 June – Warring parties in eastern Ukraine have repeatedly failed to implement ceasefire agreements, allowing hostilities to escalate and the cumulative death toll to exceed 10,000 as the conflict entered its fourth year, a new United Nations report reveals.

The report, published today, covers the three months through 15 May 2017, during which the UN human rights monitoring mission in Ukraine recorded 36 conflict-related civilian deaths and 157 injuries, a 48 per cent increase from the previous three-month period, according to a news release from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

The report finds that there were daily ceasefire violations and routine use of small arms and light and heavy weapons in the conflict zone. Such attacks and the resulting damage to critical infrastructure, including schools, hospitals and water facilities, raise serious concerns

for the protection of civilians, the report notes, warning that, as summer approaches, there is a risk of further escalation in hostilities, as in previous years.

From the start of the conflict in mid-April 2014 up to 15 May 2017, at least 10,090 people, including 2,777 civilians, have been killed, and at least 23,966 injured, according to a conservative estimate.

More than 1.6 million people fled their homes and became internally displaced, while some three million remained in territory controlled by armed groups, the report notes.

Among the issues highlighted in the report:

- The socio-economic deprivation in the east of the country has been deepening. A cumbersome verification procedure introduced in 2016 deprived more than 400,000 citizens of Ukraine of their pensions. The report recommends abolishing the requirement that pensioners from armed-group controlled territory should register as internally displaced persons to receive their pension;
- The contact line continues to divide families and communities, infringing daily the right to freedom of movement. Long queues at the checkpoints reached a record peak in March and April, with over 900,000 crossings each month, compared with 550,000 in February;
- The report contains new cases of individuals unlawfully or arbitrarily deprived of their liberty or subjected to enforced disappearances and abductions, particularly in the territory controlled by armed groups. In a number of cases, the victims' families did not have access to those detained and had no information on their whereabouts; and,

- The UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine observed systemic violations of the right to a fair trial on conflict-related charges.

Joint African action crucial to protect persons with albinism from violence, highlights UN expert

13 June – Highlighting the importance of cooperation among countries to overcome the violence and discrimination faced by persons with albinism, a United Nations rights expert has urged African nations to fully implement a regional action plan on ending attacks on persons with albinism.

“The plan sets out clearly what States can do – for example educating the public, collecting data and researching the root causes of the violence,” said the UN Independent Expert on human rights of persons with albinism, Ikponwosa Ero, in her message for International Albinism Awareness Day.

The regional action plan to end attacks on persons with albinism in Africa – the first-ever such joint initiative – was recently endorsed by the African Commission on Human and People's Rights. It includes 15 practical steps which are expected to go a long way in addressing the persisting and deadly challenge.

“International cooperation will be a turning point in the long battle to end discrimination for people with albinism, some of whom continue to be murdered for their body parts,” added Ms. Ero.

According to a news release issued by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the action plan focuses on ensuring accountability as well as support for victims and uses legal and policy frameworks to deter practices of witchcraft and trafficking in body parts.

Further, Ms. Ero underscored that persons with albinism also face significant barriers restricting their equal participation in society, impacting their rights to enjoy physical and mental health and their ability to access adequate health care, education, social services, legal protection, and redress for abuses.

In particular, women and children face violence, suffer from discrimination, stigma and social exclusion, forced into becoming marginalized within their communities and face social exclusion caused by misunderstanding, deeply entrenched prejudices and stereotyping.

'We cannot underestimate the importance of joint action' – UN Independent Expert

“We cannot rest until we have seen change in people's lives and tackled the root causes of the current situation,” she said, calling everyone concerned to be bold and to persevere to ensure that all people with albinism enjoy their full human rights.

“We cannot underestimate the importance of joint action [...] we advance together, with renewed hope inspired by the principle of 'leaving no one behind' which is at the core of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.”

Ms. Ero's statement has been endorsed by the African Commission on Human and People's Rights; the UN Special Rapporteur on physical and mental health, Dainius Pûras; the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, Mutuma Ruteere; the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, Ms. Catalina Devandas Aguilar; and the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Agnes Callamard.



A child, who is blind and has albinism reads Braille at a primary school for children with disabilities in the town of Moshi, Kilimanjaro Region. Photo: UNICEF/Pirozzi

Special Rapporteurs are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

In December 2014, the UN General Assembly designated 13 June as the International Albinism Awareness Day to draw attention to the stigma and violence that persons with albinism everywhere in the world.

At EXPO 2017, UN agencies highlight benefits of clean energy for all

13 June – Showcasing the centrality of the energy sector to address global sustainable development challenges, United Nations agencies in Kazakhstan at EXPO 2017 have urged the global community for new momentum to ongoing efforts towards transition to clean energy.

“I hope EXPO 2017 will advance dialogues between governments, climate scientists and engineers to find practical solutions for reducing greenhouse gas emissions while generating energy,” said Cihan Sultanođlu, the UN Commissioner-General for the Organization's participation at the EXPO, currently underway in the Kazakh capital, Astana.

“We need to maintain, strengthen and support the transition in all possible ways,” she added.

At the EXPO, which kicked off on 10 June, UN entities have been highlighting the importance of ensuring universal access to energy, global best practices in reduction of carbon emissions, greening the economy, and adaptation of innovative technologies. They have also setup interactive models of energy and irrigation systems that are powered by hydro-, solar and the wind power for visitors to get a first-hand experience on how these work.

The energy sector, accounting for more than two-thirds of global greenhouse gas emissions is at the heart of efforts to keep the global temperature rise below 2 degrees Celsius, as envisioned in the Paris Agreement on climate change.

Furthermore, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agreed by all UN Member States in September 2015 also calls including a specific goal (Goal 7) on ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.

These are the bases for a clear roadmap, drawn by the international community towards a clean and sustainable future, noted a news release issued by the UN team at EXPO 2017.

The release also highlighted the role that cities around the world are playing in shaping the evolution of energy markets.

“The influence of cities ranges from support for smart grid investments in urban infrastructure, to the setting of ambitious renewables targets in cities like San Diego and Copenhagen,” it added.

This is all the more important given that experts have forecasted that renewable energy could become cheaper than fossil fuels within a few years, freeing resources for use in other initiatives.



A visitor explores the working of a solar and wind energy model at the UN pavilion at EXPO 2017. Photo: UNIDO

Not only strong, but smart policies needed to combat terrorism – UN chief

13 June – Efforts and policies to prevent extremism must encompass all segments of the society, in particular those who have suffered structural discrimination and marginalization, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said today, warning that measures which fail to do so could end up effectively “driving” people into the hands of terrorists.

“Policies that limit human rights only end up alienating religious and ethnic communities, who would normally have every interest in fighting extremism,” Mr. Guterres highlighted at a high-level meeting – he chaired – on counter-terrorism strategies in Central Asia.



Secretary-General António Guterres. UN Photo/Mark Garten (file)

“Acknowledging and respecting people's dignity and rights – including their frustrations and critical opinions – helps to combat extremism, by building social cohesion and a sense of the common good,” he added.

The threat from terrorism and violent extremism has gotten worse with terrorist organizations becoming increasingly transnational, enabling and inspiring attacks and radicalizing individuals, particularly youth, outside of conflict zones.

Multilateral solutions are therefore essential for successfully addressing the challenges, noted the UN chief.

And in this context, he applauded the efforts of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, which in 2011, had adopted the Ashgabat Declaration and the Joint Plan of Action for the Implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Central Asia – the first regional initiative of its kind.

“It reflected [the] countries' commitment to jointly addressing and defeating the scourge of terrorism, with the support of the UN,” said Mr. Guterres, noting that the plan of action has become an example for others around the world, and stands out as an impressive display of collective action, leadership and political will.

The UN chief further called on the countries to continue to work together on issues such as countering the financing of terrorism, enhancing border security, nurturing dialogue with religious institutions and leaders, as well as highlighting the role of the media in addressing terrorism and violent extremism.

“Central Asia has the opportunity to show global leadership by developing national and possibly a regional plan of action to prevent violent extremism [...] the UN continues to stand ready to assist in these efforts,” he said.

Also today at the meeting held in the Turkmen capital, Ashgabat, ministers from the five Central Asian countries adopted a joint declaration on strengthening regional collaboration to counter-terrorism.

They also resolved to implement the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (adopted by the General Assembly, by consensus, in 2006) as well as the recommendations of the Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism by promoting dialogue and conflict prevention, addressing the foreign terrorist fighters phenomenon, promoting skills development and employment facilitation, countering terrorist narratives and the misuse of information technologies.

Experts urge support for most marginalized persons with disabilities, as UN forum begins



Karima suffered an above-elbow amputation since an early age. With the prosthesis, Karima is now employed with the Lebanese Physically Handicapped Union. Photo: OCHA/ Ghazza

13 June – As the largest and most diverse international disability meeting in the world kicks off at the United Nations in New York, leading experts in the field are calling for greater recognition of a range of human rights and fundamental freedoms for persons with disabilities while focusing on helping the most vulnerable among them.

“This conference needs to achieve a clear understanding on how to reach the most vulnerable among disabled persons, those who are affected by humanitarian crises and natural disasters and military conflicts,” says Theresia Degener, Chair of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

“Most often [the most vulnerable among disabled persons] are disabled women and disabled girls. And if we do not tackle multiple discrimination, we don’t reach these most vulnerable groups of

persons with disabilities,” she added in an interview with UN News ahead of the 10th session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

The Conference of States Parties is held each year to exchange experience and ideas for implementation of the Convention, which was adopted in December 2006 with the aim of promoting full equality and participation of persons with disabilities in society. There are currently 173 countries that have joined the Convention, making it one of the most widely ratified international human rights instruments.

Over one billion people in the world live with some form of disability. Persons with disabilities continue to be subject to stereotypes, prejudices, harmful practices and stigma.

“It is important to acknowledge that since the adoption of the Convention, 11 years ago, a lot of things are changing around the world,” Catalina Devandas Aguilar, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, told UN News.

“We are seeing more accessibility, so it is easier for persons that use wheelchairs to move around. It is easier to have access to services, and that is fantastic.”

Referring to her own day-to-day life, she defines the city in which she is based – Geneva, Switzerland – as fully accessible. Public transportation provides her with access to any place she wants to go, enabling her to benefit from all services that are available in her community. “I did not have that kind of access when I was little growing up in Costa Rica,” she says, recalling her childhood.

Ms. Degener also noted the progress made in recent years. “We can see that many countries have changed their laws, especially in respect to guardianship laws, mental health laws and voting laws.”

As a result, she added, “persons with disabilities have achieved more access to the election process and have achieved more freedom.”

Both women acknowledged that while progress has been made in a number of areas, several challenges still remain.

Support for women and girls with disabilities

One of the areas that requiring greater attention is creating the conditions that would enable women to work, given that the employment rate for women with disabilities is much lower than that for men. In this regard, Ms. Devandas called on all parties to step up efforts in this area, saying that “urgent action is needed.”

“There is very little attention [paid] to the dramatic situation that women with disabilities as well as girls with disabilities face in their daily lives. Not only in regards to employment, in regards to violence and in regards to education. You can add and add, because multiple layers of discrimination apply to women with disabilities.”

“To change that, we need to increase the awareness and put more effort into recognizing the support that women with disabilities need to exercise their rights,” she stated.

She went on to say: “When we are talking about the rights of persons with disabilities, we are not talking a man in a wheelchair. We are talking about a very diverse group of people. And we need very diverse solutions. We cannot forget that to talk about inclusion, we need to be inclusive ourselves.”

The Convention and the Sustainable Development Goals

In 2015, States adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. Ms. Degener noted that there is much in common between the Convention and the 17 Goals.

“Most of the rights enshrined in the Convention are also found in the Sustainable Development Goals. Whereas the Millennium Development Goals did not include disabled people, the SDGs do that now. Disability is mainstreamed.

“So, by trying to implement the SDGs, States Parties try to implement the purpose of the CRPD.”

She continued: “Also, we need to remember that a fifth of very poor populations in the world, those who live on less than a dollar a day, are made up of disabled people and their families. So when States Parties work towards eradication of poverty of disabled people they also implement the Convention by ensuring that disabled people can live a life which that has an adequate standard of living.”

Inclusive social protection

With the start of the second decade of the Convention, Ms. Devandas cited two areas where advancement would be particularly beneficial. “The first one is if social protection policies are fully inclusive of persons with disabilities. The second one is to guarantee that support networks will be available for persons with disabilities.

“This means that persons with disabilities will be covered by universal health coverage, that we will have access to pensions, will have access to a specific benefit to support income, but also to recognize that we have additional costs for participation.

“At the same time, there should be this acknowledgement that support needs to be provided,” stressed Ms. Devandas. “In our societies everyone is supported. We do not notice anymore. We live in a world that is designed to support able-bodied people, but persons with disabilities as part of diversity also need support, and their support is different.

“We need to make sure that personal assistant devices and technology is provided to persons with disabilities so that we can fully participate on an equal basis with others. I think that if we have those things, it will make a dramatic difference in the lives of persons living with disabilities.”