



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and  
to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly  
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and  
peace for the twenty-first century”**

### **Statement submitted by Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

As the world comes together to assess the progress that has made to realise gender equality and the human rights of women and girls everywhere – the vision of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action – it is critical to reflect on how this vision is being fulfilled, or not, for women and girls with disabilities.

For far too long, women and girls with disabilities have been invisible. From the World Report on Disability (World Health Organization and World Bank, 2011) we know that one in five women live with a disability globally, compared to one in eight men. We know that in low and middle income countries, women make up three quarters of persons with disabilities. We also know, from our own experience and a growing evidence base, that persons with disabilities face a magnitude of stigma and discrimination in realising their human rights in all aspects of their lives – this includes access to quality healthcare, access to quality education, access to employment opportunities, and participation in political processes, such as voting. There is also evidence that women with disabilities are at least twice as likely as women without a disability to be raped or sexually abused (Hughes K, et al., Prevalence and risk of violence against adults with disabilities: a systematic review and meta-analysis of observational studies. *Lancet* 2012; 379: 1621-9).

Data paint a clear picture that women and girls with disabilities face double discrimination (gender and disability). This is further compounded when women and girls with disabilities are also part of other groups that are marginalized or disadvantaged, such as migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons, indigenous persons and ethnic minorities, and persons living in rural areas and/or the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual, queer or questioning, intersex community. As a result, women and girls with disabilities are often faced with additional disadvantages, even in comparison to men and boys with disabilities and the women and girls without disabilities.

It is welcome that the global political momentum around disability has been growing for some years. Fundamental to this is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which has been ratified by 180 countries. This is expanded on by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities General Comment No 3 on women and girls with disabilities, adopted in 2016 – the year that also witnessed the explicit inclusion of disability in a number of the Sustainable Development Goals. In 2018, under the leadership of the Governments of Kenya and the United Kingdom, the Global Disability Summit brought together governments, disabled persons' organizations, donors, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector to make ambitious and extensive commitments on disability inclusion.

In 2019, the United Nations launched a Disability Inclusion Strategy and the World Bank made disability a cross-cutting theme across the International Development Association Replenishment. We are also seeing more and more countries enact national legislation that seeks to address the stigma and discrimination faced by persons with disabilities.

To truly realize the vision of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, we must advance the human rights of women and girls with disabilities. Therefore, it is imperative that the aforementioned commitments, strategies, and laws are translated into reality.

We call on all Member States, United Nations agencies, civil society, disabled persons' organizations, and other stakeholders to:

- Strengthen and increase efforts to empower women and girls with disabilities.

- Ensure the full and equal participation and representation of women and girls with disabilities in all aspects of politics and public life, including at the United Nations General Assembly High Level Meeting on Gender Equality in September 2020.
- In line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, promote a rights-based approach to all national policies and legislation, as well as all development policy and programming, that is inclusive of women and girls with disabilities.
- Ensure that gender equality strategies, policies, and programmes are inclusive of women and girls with disabilities.
- Consider the individual needs and vulnerabilities of women and girls with disabilities in efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls.
- Close the gaps that exist in internationally comparable data on disability by collecting, analysing, reporting, and utilizing gender and disability disaggregated data to support evidence-based inclusive decision-making.

This year, 2020, marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It should be a time of honest reflection, recognizing where we can and must do better – we cannot continue with business as usual over the next 25 years and expect anything to change for women and girls with disabilities. We must act now.

The Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind is committed to continuing to work with and support partners and governments to ensure that women and girls with disabilities are not left behind.

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