

African Disability Forum, Arab Organization of Persons with Disabilities, ASEAN Disability Forum, Down Syndrome International, European Disability Forum, Inclusion International, International Federation of Hard of Hearing People, International Federation for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus, Latin American Network of Non-Governmental Organizations of Persons with Disabilities and their Families, Pacific Disability Forum, World Blind Union, World Federation of the Deaf, World Federation of the DeafBlind, World Network of Users and Survivors of Psychiatry



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Mr. António Guterres, Secretary General
CC: Ana Maria Menéndez, Under-Secretary-General
United Nations, New York

Monday 27 April 2020

Your Excellency Mr. António Guterres,

On behalf of the [International Disability Alliance](#) and the [International Disability and Development Consortium](#), we want to express our deepest appreciation for the significant efforts by the United Nations Secretariat to fulfil inclusion of persons with disabilities in the UN response to the COVID-19 global pandemic. In particular, we appreciate the explicit inclusion of persons with disabilities on multiple occasions, as well as discussing the disability-inclusive response by the United Nations in the webinar hosted by the UN Secretariat and the World Health Organization on April 15.

We are writing to request your immediate action in order to address the dearth of accessibility of the information shared by the United Nations and its agencies on the COVID-19 response. Many persons with disabilities, including deaf and hard of hearing persons, blind and partially-sighted persons, persons with deafblindness, and persons with intellectual disabilities are not able to access the vital information being shared by the United Nations through public briefings, social media, web-pages and other channels because the information is not provided in accessible formats or alternative modes of communication.

We believe that your action in this regard will significantly contribute in ultimate success of the global efforts to control the pandemic as roughly 15 per cent of the world population will have the information to actively participate in protecting themselves and others. We also believe that ensuring equal access to information and communication as recognized in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and reemphasized in the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy launched in 2019, would create a strong example for all member States, UN agencies and other actors to take effective steps toward accessibility and inclusion.

Accordingly, we request you to:

- Take immediate action to ensure that public briefings and webinars delivered by the United Nations and its agencies, including the World Health Organization, on the COVID-19 pandemic are accessible to all. This must include using radio channels to reach out to people in the most remote areas, providing captioning,



- International Sign interpretation, plain language and good pace while avoiding technical terms and acronyms without providing proper explanation;
- Take immediate action to ensure that digital communications including the webpages and social media channels of the United Nations and its agencies including the World Health Organization are accessible for all persons with disabilities by complying with the W3C [WCAG 2.1 standard](#) (Level A and AA) and by sharing accessible word formats and accessible [ePub](#) and PDFs rather than scanned versions of the material;
 - Adopt necessary steps to ensure that disability-inclusion and accessibility is mainstreamed in all activities by the United Nations COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Fund (COVID-19 MPTF), and specific funding is allocated through this initiative to address exclusion of persons with disabilities from the COVID-19 response and recovery;
 - Take all appropriate measures to ensure that all agencies and offices of the UN family are committed to information and communication accessibility. This includes ensuring that UN staff, including the communication, web-management and public engagement teams are informed of and act to comply with the above-mentioned accessibility requirements in particular with regard to information and communication essential for the COVID-19 response and recovery.
 - Use all appropriate means to urge other actors including Member States to immediately ensure access to essential covid-19 information and adopt a time-bound plan to make all public information and communication accessible for all persons with disabilities.

We thank you very much for your consistent support and commitment to the human rights of persons with disabilities and remain at your disposal for any support we can provide to address this critical issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ana Lucia Arellano".

Ana Lucia Arellano
Chair, International Disability
Alliance

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dominic Haslam".

Dominic Haslam
Chair, International Disability and
Development Consortium

IDA Member Organizations

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