

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. Filippo Grandi

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Geneva

Tuesday 12 May 2020

Dear Mr. Filippo Grandi,

On behalf of the [International Disability Alliance](#) and the [International Disability and Development Consortium](#), we want to express our deepest appreciation for UNHCR's significant efforts to ensure the inclusion of refugees with disabilities in the response to the COVID-19 global pandemic. In particular, we are grateful to learn about the explicit requirement of all communications being accessible in two key guidance documents developed to support UNHCR operations' response to COVID-19. We also appreciate provision of live captioning for your video briefings about the pandemic.

However, we are concerned that not all communications have been made accessible for and inclusive of persons with disabilities. We are writing to request your immediate action in order to address the lack of accessible information shared by the UNHCR and its regional and country offices on the COVID-19. Many persons with disabilities, including deaf and hard of hearing persons, blind and partially sighted persons, and persons with intellectual disabilities are not able to access vital information being shared by UNHCR through public briefings, social media, webpages and other channels because the information is not provided in accessible formats. Looking into social media messages and blogs sharing information and update on supporting refugees with disabilities during the pandemic, we find very limited references to persons with disabilities both as a group of refugees requiring support and as agents who can play active role in combatting the crisis.

Persons with disabilities should have access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, information and communication technology and systems and other facilities in line with the United Nations Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Additionally, the Secretary-General launched the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS) in June 2019. This strategy provides a foundation for sustainable and transformative change toward disability inclusion throughout all pillars of the UN system. UNDIS contains 15 common-system indicators to measure the implementation of the Strategy, including indicators on accessibility, accessibility of conferences and events and communication.

We believe that by ensuring accessibility of information and communication, UNHCR would contribute more significantly to ensuring that people with disabilities are not

discriminated against in the COVID-19 response and play an active role in addressing this global crisis. This would be particularly crucial for refugees with disabilities who face additional barriers in accessing information and services, and significantly rely on information shared by UNHCR global, regional and country offices.

Accordingly, we request you to:

- Ensure that public briefings and webinars by UNHCR that are designed to update about the COVID-19 situation are accessible by providing captioning, International Sign interpretation, use of plain language, speech at a good pace, and avoiding technical terms and acronyms without providing proper explanation;
- Ensure that digital communications, including webpages and social media channels of UNHCR are accessible for all persons with disabilities by ensuring that it is possible to modify font and background colour, providing audio description for visual material such as infographics, diagrams and videos, and sharing Word formats and accessible PDFs rather than scanned versions of material;
- Take appropriate measures to ensure that all UNHCR staff, including the communication, web-management and public engagement teams, have the capacity to produce accessible information and are informed of and comply with accessibility requirements;
- Promote sharing of presentation materials in advance to sign language interpreters, CART providers and those using screen reader software.

We thank you very much for your consistent and continuous support and commitment to the human rights of persons with disabilities. We remain at your disposal for any support that we can provide, including engagement with UNHCR's communication team to provide more specific support to address this critical issue.

Sincerely,



Ana Lucia Arellano
**Chair, International Disability
Alliance**



Dominic Haslam
**Chair, International Disability and
Development Consortium**

IDA Member Organizations

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Annex of resources to support the generation of accessible information

- International Disability Alliance and International Disability and Development Consortium: [Accessibility Campaign documents](#)
- CBM: [Digital Accessibility Toolkit](#)
- Deaf/Hard of Hearing Technology Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center: [Accessibility Tips for a Better Zoom/Virtual Meeting Experience](#)
- International Federation of Hard of Hearing People: [Accessibility during the Coronavirus \(Word version here\)](#)
- International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES): [Holding Accessible and Inclusive Virtual Meetings](#)
- National Deaf Center: [What strategies are available for deafblind students using interpreters remotely?](#) and [COVID-19 information](#)
- National Deaf Center: [How to Host Effective and Accessible Online Meetings with Deaf Participants](#)
- Rooted in Rights: [How to Make Your Virtual Meetings and Events Accessible to the Disability Community](#)
- Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities: [Accessibility of Video Conferencing Apps and Services](#)
- The Big Hack: [Best video conferencing apps and software for accessibility](#)
- University of Washington: [Creating accessible videos](#) and [Adding captions in Zoom](#)
- Women’s Major Group webinar series on online platforms and accessibility: (1) Methodology and accessibility [recording](#) and (2) [presentation](#) and Logistics [recording](#) and [presentation](#)
- World Blind Union, the Global Initiative for Inclusive Information and Communication Technologies, and International Association of Accessibility Professionals Webinar [on How to Create and Evaluate Digital Documents](#)
- World Federation of the Deaf: [Guidelines on Providing Access to Public Health Information in National Sign Languages during the Coronavirus Pandemic](#)
- World Federation of the Deafblind, European Deafblind Union, the African Federation of the Deafblind, the Latin American Federation of the Deafblind: [Recommendations on inclusive policies from the global deafblind community](#)

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