

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



International Disability Alliance  
150 route de Ferney, PO Box 2100  
CH 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland  
+41 22 788 42 73

205 East 42nd Street, 20<sup>th</sup> floor  
New York, NY 10017, USA  
+1 6467760822

info@ida-secretariat.org  
www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org

**Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus**  
**CC: Dr Zsuzsanna Jakab, Dr. Michael J. Ryan**  
**World Health Organization**

Avenue Appia 20  
1211 Geneva  
Telephone: +41-22-7912111

**Tuesday 31 March 2020**  
**New York**

Dear Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus,

On behalf of the International Disability Alliance, an organization of persons with disabilities that brings together over 1,100 organizations of persons with disabilities and their families from across eight global and six regional networks, and represents more than one billion people with disabilities globally, we wish to thank you for the efforts undertaken by the World Health Organization to rapidly and effectively prevent the spread of the COVID-19 including among persons with disabilities. Specifically, we welcome the disability briefing issued by WHO last week which includes many significant recommendations for various key actors.

We would like to bring to your attention an issue of concern regarding triage protocols. We are receiving information on discriminatory treatment of persons with disabilities when accessing emergency services. While the extent of the problem has not been officially documented, we are aware that criteria such as 'dependency' and 'frailty' are used in several contexts to deny treatment, reflecting that the lives of persons with disabilities are less of a priority than others. While we understand that overstretched health systems may come to the point in which difficult choices are inevitable if no appropriate investment is urgently made; these decisions, in no case, should be made on the grounds of existing impairments. This is obvious discrimination



and violates international human rights law, particularly the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The International Disability Alliance strongly requests the World Health Organization to openly condemn such criteria whether included in official guidelines or being applied in practice, and to provide decisive guidance to States against it. We welcome the reversion of this policy in Spain, but we fear that these practices will continue to replicate as the situation evolves. As perfectly reflected in the WHO COVID-19 Disability Briefing, prejudice against persons with disabilities and discriminatory views exist across all society, and the medical community is no exception. Should protocols ignore or miss to prohibit de-prioritization on the basis of impairments, persons with disabilities will most likely be *de facto* excluded when the health system collapses due to scarcity of resources and pick of the outbreak.

Therefore, we urge the World Health Organization to:

- Take immediate action condemning any form of disability-based or age-based prioritization in providing COVID-19 medical care;
- Encourage all governments to act immediately and to the maximum of their available resources to ensure that no person is denied access to COVID-19 vital medical care as well as life-saving equipment or medicine on the basis of age and/or disability;
- Deliver medical treatment triage decision-making criteria in full compliance with the principles of humanity including equal dignity and non-discrimination for all.

We thank you for your attention to this crucial issue and remain at your disposal to provide whatever support and input you may need to address the situation of persons with disabilities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ana Lucia Arellano", written in a cursive style.

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