

## Annual interactive debate on the rights of persons with disabilities

### Theme: Article 8 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, on awareness raising

*Concept note (as of 12 February 2020)*

- Date and venue:** Friday, 6 March 2020, 4 - 6 p.m., Palais des Nations, Room XX, Geneva  
(will be broadcast live and archived on <http://webtv.un.org>)
- Objectives:** This panel discussion will address awareness raising as a tool for empowering persons with disabilities and changing societal attitudes that prevent the enjoyment of their rights under article 8 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (hereinafter “Convention”). The objectives are:
- **To bring greater understanding** to the importance of awareness raising under article 8 of the Convention as a tool for its implementation;
  - **To discuss how attitudinal barriers** restrict or prevent the enjoyment of rights by persons with disabilities;
  - **To analyse** the experiences of awareness raising in different contexts, including campaigns, trainings and media;
  - **To share experiences, lessons learned and good practices** in the implementation of article 8 of the Convention, drawing on experiences from the global and national levels;
  - **To propose strategies** for strengthened implementation of article 8 of the Convention at national level.
- Chair:** H.E. Ms. Socorro Flores Liera, Vice-President of the Human Rights Council
- Opening statement:** Ms. Michelle Bachelet, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
- Panellists:**
- Ms. Catalina Devandas Aguilar, Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities
  - Ms. Risnawati Utami, Member of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
  - Mr. Ishumael Zhou, President of the African Union of the Blind and Member of the International Disability Alliance
  - Mr. Andy Stevenson, Senior Producer, Channel 4 and Whisper
- Outcome:** The debate will seek to bring greater understanding to awareness raising as a complementary tool to implement the Convention. In addition, the debate will identify good practices and strategies in ensuring effective awareness raising through media, direct engagement of persons with disabilities and attitude changing trainings. An informal summary of the interactive debate will be prepared by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and posted on the OHCHR website.
- Mandate:** In its resolution 37/22, the Human Rights Council decided that the annual interactive debate on the rights of persons with disabilities to be held at its fortieth-third session would focus on article 8 of the Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities regarding awareness raising, and would have international sign interpretation and captioning. The Council requested the OHCHR to prepare the annual study on the rights of persons with disabilities for its fortieth-third session on article 8 of the Convention, in consultation with States and other relevant stakeholders, regional organizations, the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, civil society organizations, including organizations of persons with disabilities, and national human rights institutions, requiring contributions to be submitted in an accessible format, and

requested that such stakeholder contributions, the study and an easy-to-read-version of it, be made available on the website of the Office, in an accessible format, prior to the fortieth-third session of the Human Rights Council.

To this end, OHCHR invited States and all the aforementioned stakeholders to provide responses to a set of questions concerning existing legislation, policies and practices ensuring a human rights-based approach to awareness raising. OHCHR received 29 responses from States and a regional organization, 16 responses from national human rights institutions and 14 responses from civil society organizations.<sup>1</sup> These responses informed the report of OHCHR on awareness-raising under article 8 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (document [A/HRC/43/27](#)).

**Format:** The annual debate will be limited to two hours. The opening statement and initial presentations by the panellists will be followed by an interactive discussion divided into two slots. A maximum of one hour will be set aside for the podium, including the opening statement, panellists' presentations and their responses to questions and concluding remarks. The remaining hour will be reserved for two slots of interventions from the floor for States and observers (2x12), national human rights institutions (2x1) and non-governmental organizations (2x2).

The list of speakers for the discussion will be established at the beginning of the debate and, as per practice, statements by high-level dignitaries and groups of States will be moved to the beginning of the list. Each speaker will have two minutes to raise issues and to ask panellists questions. Delegates who have not been able to take the floor due to time constraints will be able to upload their statements on the online system to be posted on the HRC Extranet. Interpretation will be provided in the six United Nations official languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish).

**Accessibility:** In an effort to render the Human Rights Council more accessible to persons with disabilities and to promote their full participation in the work of the Council on an equal basis with others, the event will be made fully accessible. During the debate, international sign interpretation and real-time captioning in English will be provided and webcasted. In Room XX, four seats are reserved for participants using wheelchairs, in the seventh (last) row. Hearing loops are available for collection from the Accessibility focal point at the Secretariat desk. Oral statements may be embossed in Braille from any of the six official languages of the United Nations, upon request and following the procedure described in the "Accessibility guide to the Human Rights Council for persons with disabilities" (available at <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/Accessibility.aspx>).

**Background:** For the first time in the international legal framework, awareness raising is considered in a stand-alone provision. The prominence given to awareness raising is a consequence of the experience gained over the years in human rights implementation that shows that legal frameworks on their own are insufficient to bring about the changes in culture and attitudes that are necessary for the enjoyment of rights. In addition, awareness raising is key to combat stereotypes that lead to discrimination against persons with disabilities.

Awareness raising has different dimensions that need to be properly identified to achieve effective changes in society. According to existing research, awareness raising programmes need to reflect this multidimensional perspective in connection to the objective behind each action. In order to achieve this, people working on awareness raising need to understand the stigma, stereotypes and prejudice that usually affect persons with disabilities and define the purpose of the programme and the target audience. Empowerment of persons with disabilities through guaranteeing their access to information on their rights is key, and this could be achieved through different communication strategies, including massive campaigns. Nevertheless, societal change requires attitude-changing programmes that have their particularities when it comes to persons with disabilities. In addition, media has an important role to play both to

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Disability/Pages/StudiesReportsPapers.aspx>

communicate from a human rights perspective and to portray persons with disabilities in their real dimension.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognizes the importance of awareness raising and promotes an approach to it that provides for raising awareness throughout society, including at the family level, regarding persons with disabilities, and fostering respect for their rights and dignity; combating stereotypes, prejudices and harmful practices relating to persons with disabilities, including those based on sex and age, in all areas of life; and promoting awareness of the capabilities and contributions of persons with disabilities.

In order to implement article 8 of the Convention, States should undertake steps and implement measures aiming at initiating and maintaining effective public awareness campaigns designed to nurture receptiveness to the rights of persons with disabilities, positive perceptions and greater social awareness towards them; promote recognition of the skills, merits and abilities of persons with disabilities, and of their contributions to the workplace and the labour market; fostering at all levels of the education system, including in all children from an early age, an attitude of respect for the rights of persons with disabilities; encouraging all organs of the media to portray persons with disabilities in a manner consistent with the purpose of the Convention; and promoting awareness-training programmes regarding persons with disabilities and the rights of persons with disabilities.

**Background documents:**

- [Human Rights Council resolution 7/9](#) of 27 March 2008 on human rights of persons with disabilities
- [Human Rights Council resolution 37/22](#) of 20 March 2018 on equality and non-discrimination of persons with disabilities and the right of persons with disabilities to access to justice
- Report of OHCHR on awareness-raising under article 8 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ([A/HRC/43/27](#))
- OHCHR web page with [studies, reports and papers on the rights of persons with disabilities](#)