



Advancing the rights and inclusion of people with disabilities worldwide

RI Global Newsletter, March 2019

Think Equal, Build Smart, Innovate for Change: CSW63

The sixty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women took place at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from 11 to 22 March 2019, with the priority theme “Social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.” In addition, it also evaluated progress in the implementation of the agreed conclusions from the 60th session (2016) on “Women’s empowerment and the link to sustainable development”. The ten-day session included a ministerial segment with round tables and other high-level interactive dialogues, a general discussion, as well as interactive and expert panel discussions. Stakeholders also organized many side events to draw attention to critical aspects of the work on gender equality.

Every year, representatives of member States, United Nations entities and non-governmental organizations gather at the United Nations Headquarters in New York for the annual session. It provides an opportunity to review progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women, identify challenges, set global standards and norms and formulate policies to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment worldwide. It is also a key opportunity for policy-makers, advocates, researchers and activists to network and strategize, mobilize and plan new initiatives and actions to further the cause of gender equality and women’s empowerment.

Ms. Venus Ilagan, Secretary General of Rehabilitation International, spoke as a representative of Rehabilitation International and the global disability community at the official commemoration of the International Women’s Day, on 8 March 2019 at the UN Headquarters in New York, in conjunction to the sixty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Under the theme

“Think Equal, Build Smart, Innovate for Change”, Ms. Ilagan shared her personal story as a woman with disabilities from a small community in the Philippines, highlighting that a woman with a disability is the expert of her own situation and that we need to start seeing more women and girls with disabilities as innovators and entrepreneurs, including by prioritizing the education of girls with disabilities and promoting girls in STEM. She also called for the shift in paradigms in our understanding of disability issues and the actions to break the barriers to equalize opportunities to all.



Ms. Ilagan with UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka at the CSW63

**International Women’s Day presentation:
Think Equal, build smart, innovate for change**

By Venus Ilagan, Secretary General, Rehabilitation International

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I bring to you greetings from my organization, Rehabilitation International and the global community of persons with disabilities particularly women and girls. I am greatly honored to address you today so I convey my sincerest thanks to the organizers of this very important event for the opportunity.

I was born and raised in a small community in the northern-most part of the Philippines – situated in one of the 7,100 islands that make up the archipelago that is often battered by tropical cyclones locally called “typhoons” – where an average of 26 such typhoons visit most of the islands each year. Living in islands can be challenging for people without disabilities so there is no question how challenging it is for those of us with disabilities. People who have witnessed me going about the normal activities of my daily life have often wondered how a woman sitting on a wheelchair managed to get an education (at a time when schools were not accessible), was fortunate to land a job as a media practitioner (when people with disabilities were not even considered for jobs), and had a successful marriage including having a son (when women with disabilities were largely regarded as asexual, have no child-bearing capabilities and do not fit the characteristics normally attributed to being a good wife/partner and mother)? Those interesting expression in people’s faces when they looked at me made me realize the depth of misconception about disability and people’s lack of understanding of the subject.

For a woman with a disability, the challenges are great but not insurmountable. A woman with a disability is the expert of her own situation. She appreciates her strengths, understands her limitations and knows by heart how to overcome her challenges. She knows that disability may limit her capacity to physically move from one place to the other but it will never be something that will dampen her spirit nor diminish her will to pursue her dreams and live them through. For the woman who is determined to overcome her limitations, there could be no barriers that can stop her from prevailing over whatever stands in her way.

Today, I speak to you as somebody who had experienced it all – discrimination, exclusion, stigma, oppression – name it, I have been through it as a woman with a disability from a developing country. The journey from my little island home in the Philippines to the mega-city of New York was never easy but something I thought was doable for one who is determined to succeed.

Looking back, I can’t help but think about why people make quite a big deal about disability and disabled people. Why can’t disability be seen as a normal part of human diversity? Afterall, every person has a limitation. The only difference is that some have visible limitations and we are labelled “persons with disabilities”, while others have less

visible or even invisible limitations and for whatever reason, they do not want to be called people with disabilities – often because of the stigma that is attached to disability. Disability is not a monolithic issue, it is a social construct that tends to define a group of people rather than making it a norm to be inclusive of all people, embracing differences and appreciating what each of us can contribute at making life better for everyone.

Innovative technologies have led to the emergence of social innovations and innovative products that are transforming assistive devices and services offered to women and girls with disabilities. We need to start seeing more women and girls with disabilities as innovators and entrepreneurs, including by prioritizing the education of girls with disabilities and promoting girls in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and design). Their perspectives will ensure that new technologies and innovative solutions address shared issues and concerns.

It's a win-win for everyone especially in the emergence of issues associated to our current reality of aging populations. Living longer lives bring new challenges. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicate that life expectancy in this country is approaching 79 years so it's time to think about the challenges that goes with longevity – the need to use wheelchairs, hearing aids and other assistive devices, the preference to use ramps rather than climbing up stairs, and the inevitability to becoming dependent on others for certain tasks and functions rather than doing these ourselves - are just a few of the innumerable needs that must be invested in to meet the needs of all women and girls.

In this changing world, it is important to hear directly from us. We have the opportunity to be a more inclusive society with innovation and technology. It's time for us to start looking at disabilities as an opportunity to change perspectives and attitudes, to give a more positive second look into a subject that some of us may have been afraid to even talk about. Accepting disability as a “normal” part of life would enable us to celebrate our diversity, appreciate our differences and a chance to embark at finding innovative solutions to challenges that we would eventually face as a result of living longer lives. Acknowledging the shift in paradigms in our understanding of disability issues – one that is extremely intersectional and which affects all of us, will give us the opportunity to prepare for what lies ahead, enabling us to live not just longer lives but more importantly, meaningful and productive lives. We have the power to make a difference not just for ourselves but for others – in helping overcome obstacles and barriers created by non-inclusive societies. Please help us break the barriers to equalize opportunities to all – including those with disabilities. Thank you.

(Venus Ilagan, RI Secretary General, was the featured speaker at the opening program for the celebration of the International Women's Day at the United Nations on March 8, 2019. Ms. Ilagan is the first woman with a disability to have been invited as a featured speaker in an IWD opening celebration at this level in more recent years following the implementation of the UN-CRPD.)

RI Global: Around the World

Internet + Training for Persons with Disabilities held in Guangzhou, China

The Internet+ Training for Persons with Disabilities, a RI-funded project proposed by Fuhong Society of Macau, was successfully held from 17 to 21 December in Guangzhou, China. About 60 participants from 13 countries and regions joined the five-day training event. The participants exchanged on their experience and learned about the knowledge on Internet + assistive devices fitting, management of e-commercial business, community marketing, etc., from the lectures and the panel discussions. In addition, the training event also organized the participants to visit the CanYou Group, an Internet enterprise with over 90% of its employees having disability, headquartered in Shenzhen, China.



The five-day training event received positive feedbacks. Many participants found the training useful for them to catch up with the digital trend and explore Internet-related employment opportunities. "It helps me to have more knowledge about E-commerce. Moreover, I have also

learnt about the way we start up online business, which is very necessary for people with disabilities”, commented as one of the participants at the training.

USICD: New Mission, Vision for 2019 -2023

In 2018, the USICD Board of Directors conducted Strategic planning to build its path forward for the next five years, and now released its new mission, vision and priorities for 2019-2023. USCID will continue its efforts to advance international disability rights and inclusive development to build bridges among the U.S. and foreign governments, disability and human rights communities, and the private sector through strategic advocacy, convening, and training and education, for the vision of “ a world where the rights of persons with disabilities are universally recognized and respected, where persons with disabilities are afforded full and equal participation in their communities, and where persons with disabilities are self-sufficient and live independent and self-determined lived.”

Lebanese Welfare Association for the Handicapped: The Achievers Scholarship Fund

Lebanese Welfare Association for the Handicapped (LWAH), a RI Global member organization, received funding for eight scholarships from RI’s Global Disability Development Fund in 2018 for the Achievers Scholarship program.

The Scholarship program is targeted at students with disabilities and special needs to address the discrimination towards students with disabilities in Lebanon in the areas of education. Too often, students with disabilities are either left out of the educational system or enrolled in non-licensed special education schools, and fail to eventually integrate in regular school possible. Despite the compulsory education enforced by the Lebanese Government and extensive awareness raising by the CSOs, higher education institutions in the country still remain discouraging for students with disabilities for the lack of support.

Six students now have been awarded full scholarships at PHoenic University, starting Fall 2018 and through their university years until graduation. Jad, one of the recipients of the Achievers Scholar now fit in perfectly at the university, shared his story with RI Global.



Jad Hamade – LWAH's True Achiever Scholarship Awardee

Jad was born with Spinal Muscular Atrophy, a genetic disease affecting the part of the nervous system that controls voluntary muscle movement. Through comprehensive rehabilitation since the age of three, Jad adapted the means to work through his disability, and grew up to face the world with confidence and pride, to seize the same opportunities as everyone else. After successfully completing the national Baccalaureate examinations, Jad applied to the Achievers Scholarship program through the LWAH, and successfully became one of the first recipients of the scholarship. Jad is very proud of himself for getting so far, and his dreams are getting bigger. Currently, Jad is motivating young students like him to pursue their dreams through LWAH's Civic Engagement program, and he will surely continue to spread hope and positive energy around him and beyond.

To learn more about the work of Lebanese Welfare Association for the Handicapped (LWAH), please visit: <http://www.lwah.org.lb> Please also note that RI has issued a call for applications for project proposals to be funded by RI's Global Disability Development Fund (GDDF) and Africa Fund (AF). Applications for project funding may be submitted until the close of office hours on April 15, 2019 c/o the RISG: venusmilagan@yahoo.com. Please visit the RI website for more information on the GDDF/AF, including the revised set of application forms which now includes a budget form. The required forms can be downloaded from the RI website. Thank you.

DPOs welcomed the Royal Commission's Terms of Reference in Australia

The Australian Government has announced the beginning of a public consultation on the [draft Terms of Reference \(ToR\)](#) for the Royal Commission into the epidemic of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability. draft ToR recognized that all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation against people with disability are abhorrent and that Australia has international obligations to take appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures to promote the human rights of people with disabilities under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and to give effect to those obligations and broader responsibilities to all Australians, all Australian Governments provide funding and services for persons with disability, and have implemented laws to protect and enhance the wellbeing of people with disability.

People with disability, and Disabled People's Organizations in Australia welcomed the release and consultation. "Our Royal Commission must have people with disability at its heart and the Terms of Reference and the selection of Commissioners must reflect that", said Matthew Bowden, Co-CEO of People with Disability Australia, "We will also be looking for a dedicated line in this year's Federal Budget to give concrete costings, and to make clear that appropriate supports will be funded for people to enable survivors of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation to meaningfully and safely engaged in the Royal Commission." Dwayne Cranfield, CEO of the National Ethnic Disability Alliance, also call for actions to make sure that people with disability from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have the appropriate support, including all materials being in community languages and interpreters made available, to fully participate in the Royal Commission.

Disabled People’s Organizations Australia (DPO Australia), an alliance of four national DPOs, has also developed a roadmap for the Royal Commission towards a future where people with disability are safe, and included fully in the community. The Roadmap to Our Commission that details what the DPOs need the Royal Commission to include is available here: <http://dpoa.org.au/roadmap-royal-commission/>

RI Global News to Use

“Inherent power in data and statistics has never been more important” – The 50th Session of the UN Statistical Commission concluded.

Better data has the potential to improve our lives in many ways, from delivering better education, improving gender equality, to promoting inclusive societies where everyone is counted. Striving to deliver better data to improve the lives of people around the world, the UN Statistical Commission recently concluded its 50th session.

“The inherent power in data and statistics has never been more important than it is today,” said UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs Under-Secretary-General Liu Zhenmin, “ In an era when the whole international community is mobilized to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we need data to inform policies, to understand the world we live in, and to monitor and assess progress.”



Delegates from 135 countries, 50 agencies and 14 civil society organizations joined the session, which took place from 5 to 8 March 2019 at UN Headquarters in New York. The Commission examined 32 official documents, covering a broad spectrum of technical statistical fields, including SDG indicators, capacity building programmes, modernization of statistical systems, big data, open data, quality assurance, national accounts, environmental-economic accounting, disaster-related statistics and international migration statistics. Taking place before and in parallel to the official session, 87 side events were organized to complement and enrich discussions in key areas such as innovation and capacity building on data for sustainable development. Many of these events also showcased recent advances in the use of innovative data sources and methods in areas such as gender equality, migration, health, disability, and disaster-related statistics.

The Ford Foundation published a report titled “Road Map for Inclusion: Changing the Face of Disability in Media”

Building upon a year of intensive research and meetings, the report “Road Map for Inclusion” highlights the scale of a problem that has been overlooked for far too long: Media’s failure to adequately represent the one-in-four Americans who live with disabilities. Ford Foundation Senior Fellow Judy Heumann methodically documented the evidence and consequences of this problem, and put forward a radically simple argument: People with disabilities should be represented proportionally, both in front of and behind the camera. To get us closer to that goal, she also offers a set of clear, practical recommendations for change, including 1) create an entity focused on the inclusion of disability in the media; 2) institutions and organizations expand their definitions of “diversity” to include disability; and 3) allies and advocates look within their communities to drive change. To read the full report, please visit: <https://www.fordfoundation.org/about/library/reports-and-studies/road-map-for-inclusion-changing-the-face-of-disability-in-media>

Australian Building Codes Board (ABCB) released Accessible Housing Options Paper Consultation Report

In September 2018, the ABCB released for public consultation the [Accessible Housing Options Paper](#). The Options Paper provided a preliminary menu for options and costing on the possible inclusion of a minimum accessible standard for housing in the National Construction Code (NCC). The Option Paper was supported by national consultation forums held in October and November

2018. The forums provided an opportunity for stakeholders to have their say on accessibility housing in-person, and have questions answered directly by representatives of the ABCB.

The ABCB received many valuable comments and contributions to the Options Paper and has now publicly released an Accessible Housing Options Paper Consultation Report to further improve awareness and understanding of the project. To access the full report, please visit: <https://abcb.gov.au/Resources/Publications/Consultation/Accessible-Housing-Options-Paper-Consultation-Report>. For more information about the project, please visit: <https://abcb.gov.au/Resources/Publications/Consultation/Accessible-Housing-Project-Overview>.

The Eighth Session of the M-Enabling Summit to be held in Washington, D.C. in June

The Global Initiative for Inclusive Information and Communication Technologies (G3ict) and E.J. Krause & Associates (EJK) jointly organize the M-Enabling Summit to promote accessible technologies and environment for persons with disabilities and senior citizens. The Summit has established itself as one of the leading global conference covering the technology and innovations that enable persons with disabilities and seniors to access digital content and services in new ways. It offers a unique gathering of leading executives and accessibility professionals from Governments, industry and advocacy organizations from around the world to network and participant in plenary and specialized breakout sessions as well as other featured events.

This year, the Summit will be held from 17 to 19 June 2019 in Washington, D.C. in the United States. The Conference will organize specialized sessions on a wide range of topics, including Tech and Employment, Higher Education, Artificial Intelligence and Smart Cities for All. The speakers in the spotlight include prominent experts from the federal government, academic institutions and leading companies such as Google, Amazon and AT&T. To learn more about the Summit, please visit: <https://m-enabling.com/agenda.html>

RI Global: Mark Your Calendar

[1-5 April 2019, New York, U.S.A., the Fifty-second session of Commission on Population and Development](#)

The Commission on Population and Development will convene its fifty-second session at the UN Headquarters in New York from 1 to 5 April 2019. The theme will be “ Review and appraisal of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and its contribution to the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.” For further detail of the current session, please visit: <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/commission/sessions/2019/index.asp>

[15-17 April 2019, Berlin, Germany The 15th Congress of EFRR and the 28th Reha-kolloquium, German Congress for Rehabilitation Research](#)

The Council of European Forum for Research in Rehabilitation (EFRR) regularly bring together a wide range of rehabilitation professionals from different countries to share their knowledge, scientific ideas as well as best practices to promote closer collaboration across Europe. From 15 to 17 April this year, the 15th Congress EFRR will be held together with the Reha-kolloquium, the major German conference in the field of rehabilitation in Berlin, Germany. Under the theme “Rehabilitation – Shaping healthcare for the future”, it marks the first time that the two conferences join forces to provide an international and interdisciplinary platform. The deadline for online registration is open till 24 March 2019. For more detail, please visit: <https://www.efrr2019.com/en/Startsite/>

[25-29 April 2019, Shenzhen, China. Meeting of the RI Executive Committee and other activities.](#)

[13-17 May 2019, Geneva, Switzerland, The sixth session Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction](#)

The Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction is a biennial multi-stakeholder forum established by the UN General Assembly to review progress, share knowledge and discuss the latest developments and trends in reducing disaster risk. The sixth session will take place in Geneva, Switzerland from 13 to 17 May, 2019, convened and organized by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) and hosted by the Government of Switzerland. It will represent the next important opportunity for the international community to boost the implementation of the Sendai Framework related goals of the 2030 Agenda, as well as commitments of the Paris Climate Agreement. It is also the last global gathering for all stakeholders before the deadline for achieving

Target E of the Sendai Framework: to substantially increase the number of countries with national and local disaster risk reduction strategies by 2020. For more information, please visit: <https://www.unisdr.org/conference/2019/globalplatform/home>

[26-28 June 2019, Macau, RI Asia and Pacific Regional Conference 2019](#)

Under the theme “ Together, leaving no one behind, in disability inclusive and rights-based progress” the 2018 RI Asia and Pacific Regional Conference will organize plenary sessions focused on key issues including disability inclusive disaster risk reduction and post disaster rehabilitation, gender and disabilities, education, work, employment and social enterprise, and accessibility as well as international frameworks such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Incheon Strategy adopted for the Asia and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. For registration , please submit at: <https://www.rimacau2019.org/registration-request/> (Deadline for abstract submission is 28 February 2019).

[26-28 June 2019, Macau, Assistive Device Exhibition](#)

The Assistive Device Exhibition will be held in addition to the Rehabilitation international Asia & Pacific Regional Conference 2019. The exhibition provides a platform for the assistive devices manufacturer, participants and users to have more understanding on assistive device, aiming to present the latest information on the development of scientific and technological achievements of assistive devices. For more details, please visit: <https://www.rimacau2019.org/assistive-device-exhibition/>

[14-16 August 2019, Sydney, Australia, Access 2019 – Inclusion by Design: Equality, Diversity and the Built Environment](#)

ACAA launched Access 2019 - the conference for access consultants and all people working to establish inclusive communities. Access 2019 will provide a platform for the exchange of ideas and experiences on a range of topics that bridge the gap from access. It will also incorporate an exhibition of products and services that support and bring it all together to create inclusive environments that welcoming and responsive to people’s needs and intuitive to access and use.

Access 2019 call for papers are open till 15 February. For further details, please visit:
<https://www.accessconference.com.au/call-for-papers/>

[7-11 October 2019, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, The 7th Africa Forum on Visual Impairment](#)

“Achieving the SDGs through innovation, access, and lifelong learning”, the 7th Africa Forum will be held from 7-11 October 2019 in Addis Ababa. The Conference is open to individuals and agencies with an interest in blindness in Africa. The five-day programme will engage participants from diverse backgrounds across the globe to exchange ideas and products or the advancement of the well-beings of blind people in Africa. For registration of the Conference please visit:
<https://www.perkins.org/get-involved/events/africa-forum>