

Workshop on Disability and Disaster Preparedness – Toolkit Release

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Opening Speech

by Paola Albrito

on the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, Inclusiveness and Persons with Disabilities

Dear Members of the Council of Europe, Ambassador, dear colleagues from the European Commission, ladies and gentleman,

I am pleased to be here today at the Council of Europe Workshop on the Disability and Disaster Preparedness – Toolkit Release. The collaboration between the Council of Europe and UNISDR has been tremendous over the years in many different areas and addressing persons with disabilities has been a particularly relevant topic as it exemplifies the holistic approach and contribution needed to make risk management relevant to society. Approximately 15% of the world's population lives with some form of disability, and PWDs are disproportionately affected by disasters.

This is one of the reasons why the International Day for Disaster Reduction (IDDR) in 2013 was dedicated specifically to PWDs. This is also why in 2013, the Council of Europe kicked off this important collaboration with a global survey with close to 5,450 people from 126 countries on how PWDs cope with disasters. The survey report, together with the resulting guidelines and recommendations on Including People with Disabilities in Disaster Preparedness and Response, and now the resulting toolkit, are just some of the great results achieved.

Then last year, the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the European Union expressed the wish to take up this important topic into their work during their Presidency. Latvia hosted a dedicated workshop on the topic of persons with disabilities and DRR in January 2015 in Riga together with the Council of Europe and UNISDR. Member of the European Parliament Helga Stevens, who has been actively engaged on the topic of persons with disabilities and DRR, also contributed to the workshop.

The outcomes of this workshop came in the form of European Council Conclusions on disability-inclusive disaster management – a major breakthrough for Europe (and the world). The Council of Europe and UNISDR worked in close cooperation with Latvia in order to achieve this major political commitment of 28 European Union Member States which all agreed to jointly integrate the relevant aspects of needs of persons with disabilities into policy development, risk assessments, disaster management plans and other instruments. The announcement was made by the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs for Latvia, Ms Zanda Kalniņa-Lukaševica, at the Third UN World Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR) in Sendai, Japan in March of this year. Indeed, the results of our collaboration for persons with disabilities coming out the World Conference and the newly adopted Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, are tremendous. The European Council Conclusions represent a concrete commitment from the European Union with practical implications for disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction.

With 6,500 participants the Sendai Conference indeed captured the energy, commitment and multi actor involvement necessary to ensure that we build on a risk management approach that will make our future sustainable. 187 Countries, 25 Heads of State, Vice Presidents, and Heads of Government; 100 ministers; 42 intergovernmental organizations (including Council of Europe); 236 non-government organizations; 38 United Nations entities; over 300 private sector representatives; over 280 local governments; and over 780 journalists contributed to the Conference. All major groups (Women, Children and Youth, Farmers, Indigenous Peoples, NGOs, Trade Unions, Local Authorities, Science and Technology, Business and Industry), but also persons with disabilities, visibly and actively engaged as participants in the WCDRR events. Thirty-four events from the Official Conference Programme and Public Forum addressed issues of disability.

‘Inclusion builds resilience’ was the clear message from persons with disabilities to the World Conference. And indeed, the Conference has been regarded as one of the most accessible UN conferences ever held. This is a result that makes us all proud because it meant that more than 200 persons with disabilities actively participated in the Conference proceedings as delegates, speakers, panelists, and contributors. Member of the European Parliament Adam Kosa, who actively works on the topic of inclusivity of persons with disabilities at the European Parliament, participated in diverse events, including those related to the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

At the Conference, it became clear that significant progress has been made throughout the years, but also that more needs to be done on inclusion and accessibility across the board, from physical infrastructure to early warning announcements. As a result, not only is inclusivity fully integrated within the new Sendai Framework, but specific language on persons with disabilities is prevalent within the text. There is an entire section outlining the specific roles of key civil society actors and stakeholders in resilience building, and in particular those of volunteers, organized voluntary work and community-based organizations, so that it can be ensured that inclusiveness is translated into practice.

So what are the next steps for UNISDR after the World Conference? First, we have to get official endorsement of the Sendai Framework by the UN General Assembly, and then start developing indicators to measure our progress. We have to help stakeholders transition from the Hyogo Framework for Action to the Sendai Framework for DRR successfully and develop guidelines on how to implement the new Framework. We have to also implement the more than 200 voluntary commitments made in Sendai on the implementation of the Sendai Framework (including the one made by the European Council on disability-inclusive DRR). And, we have to ensure that relevant conferences and agreements (e.g. Financing for Development; UN Summit to adopt the post-2015 development agenda; UNFCCC COP 21, World Humanitarian Summit, and Habitat 3) are coherent with our Framework. Because, you see, disaster risk management that includes everyone, including persons with disabilities, contributes to sustainable development in the long term.

And in this spirit, I would like to invite you to start thinking about how all of these great accomplishments that we have had on the topic of PWDs and DRR – the Disability and Disaster Preparedness Toolkit, the European Council Conclusions on disability-inclusive DRR, the explicit inclusion of topic within the Sendai Framework – will be implemented in the post-2015 era. How will we continue this important work, and how can we create even more political momentum within the Council of Europe, the European Commission, on the national and local levels?

Thank you for your attention and I wish all of you a successful workshop today.