

13 June, 2023

Protection of persons with disabilities in situations of armed conflict: Obligations and implementation under CRPD and international humanitarian law

Dear Excellencies, Ladies, Gentlemen and Persons with disabilities here today.

PEACE and Love.

My name is Robinah Alambuya from Uganda I do identify as a Woman with Psychosocial Disability I serve on the Executive Council of the Africa Disability Forum(ADF) which is a member of the International Disability Alliance(IDA) ,and Transforming Communities for Inclusion(TCI Global) as President.

I first want to thank all organizers the mission of Switzerland, the International Disability Alliance, and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities for inviting me to address such important event. My experience on impact of armed conflict on persons with disabilities goes back to 1985 when as a youth fleeing from conflict/ wars in Uganda. I had to hide for 2 days in a thick bush with no food or water scared every minute that I'll be attacked by a combatant or a snake. This experience has stood with me throughout the years, that's why I've always prioritize advocating for protection of people with disabilities, children and youth during armed conflict.

I actually was very lucky that I could escape, when conflict hits but remained with the trauma, many people with disabilities are not able to access safe and dignified evacuation due to barriers such as inaccessible evacuation means, and lack of awareness among evacuating staff. For example many people who use wheelchair are being told that they should leave their wheelchairs behind. This is as if we tell someone to evacuate without their legs. For people with disabilities, assistive devices are part of their identity and body integrity.

Another major challenge is lack of information in accessible formats. The information about curfews, the location and direction to shelters, early-warning about upcoming military operations are often not provided in accessible formats such as audio or visual alternatives, sign language and easy-to-read. This may pose life-threatening challenges for persons with disabilities. For example we had several cases of a deaf person or a person with intellectual disability being shoot /beaten because they were not aware of the curfew during COVID 19 lock down.

The combatants have very limited information about people with disabilities, their specific requirements, and how to communicate with them. So in many cases people with disabilities face risk of detention or being punished because they can't follow the orders. In many cases, the shelters are not accessible and the items necessary for persons with disabilities are not included in humanitarian assistance. This is another reason while many persons with disabilities prefer not to leave their homes during military operations.

I also wish to highlight that some groups of persons with disabilities face additional intersecting barriers. For example, women with disabilities in particular women with intellectual disabilities, women with psychosocial disabilities and deaf women are at higher risk of violence and abuse including sexual and gender-based violence during armed conflict. Unfortunately, the reporting processes are often inaccessible, and the people responsible to record the complaints and support are not aware of additional risk of violence against women with disabilities. As a result, the cases of violence against women and children with disabilities is systematically under-documented and widely not remedied.

I wish to use this opportunity to request immediate action by the international mechanisms including the United Nations Security Council, the international criminal mechanisms, and all governments to take action to document, prosecute and punish cases of violations against persons with disabilities during armed conflict including gender-based violence. I hope that together, we can address this big gap and bring justice, peace and safety to people with disabilities around the world.

Thank you