



## TCI at COSP 18

### **Side Event: 20 years of UNCRPD: Addressing multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination and stigma against women and girls with disabilities**

My name is Richa Sharma-Dhamorikar, and I am the Director of Advocacy and Research at Transforming Communities for Inclusion (TCI Global). I identify as a woman with a psychosocial disability, and my organization is a post-CRPD inclusion movement and a membership-based org of persons with psychosocial disabilities. We are guided by the extraordinary vision of the CRPD, and it gives me immense pleasure to be part of this session marking 20 years of that glorious Convention.

The work of these upcoming guidelines could not be more timely. It's been 20 years of CRPD and almost 10 years since GC No. 3, and while the world has changed, some things have stayed the same or worsened. Now is the time to ensure real structural reform and full implementation. We congratulate the Committee, the WG and partners for taking this on.

I want to also take a moment to acknowledge the privilege of speaking here. This year, despite our best efforts, many of our OPD leaders could not attend in person due to visa backlogs, bureaucratic delays, and funding cuts. So, I have the honour of carrying with me our movement's experiences and messages, to this important space.

I'm here to speak about the rights of women, girls, and gender-diverse persons with psychosocial disabilities. We are glad that these new guidelines are renewing the focus on intersectionality. Because in our experience, intersectionality is still discussed more in theory than in practice. We are constantly asked to prioritize one identity over another, we can either be a woman, or a person with psychosocial disability, or rural, or indigenous, but not all at once. But we *are* all those things at once. And these guidelines must show us how to make that visible and possible in real terms.

One of the biggest and most persistent violations we face is the denial of legal capacity. The moment we receive a diagnosis or a label, we cease to exist as full persons in the eyes of the law and for our communities. Everyone else speaks over us and for us, but ourselves, be it guardians, healthcare providers, family. When we are seen as incapable, vulnerable and in need of constant protection and care, substituted decision-making regimes like guardianship and conservatorship come into play, and suddenly, all our rights are erased.

These denials are often codified in national laws and constitutions, for eg. the Fijian Mental Health Act, proposed MH bills in the UK, Maldives. All of them enable disability specific deprivation of liberty in the form of forced institutionalization and forced treatment, often in

the name of our "best interest." These are not exceptions but are a global pattern in which patriarchy, ableism, and medical violence intersect to control our bodies, silence our voices, and deny our rights.

This has a cascading effect on all aspects of our lives, but today I want to focus on SRHR and bodily autonomy. In a recent project led by Women Enabled International, where we partnered, we documented horrifying violations of legal capacity in this context.

Our constituency constantly face forced sterilization, forced abortion, and forced contraception under a paternalistic notion of protecting us. We are seen as unfit to be parents, unfit to be partners and unfit to decide. We're not given information about our bodies, about intimate relationships, or consent. We're either labelled asexual or hypersexual, both of which lead to exclusion. And when we experience GBV violence, including sexual violence, which is so common within our constituency, our testimonies are not believed, covered due to 'shame' or we are asked to be thankful as someone took an interest in us.

One deeply painful reality is that even 20 years after the CRPD, we can still be institutionalized at any time, whether in a hospital, group home, nursing facility, or religious centers. And the world lets it happen. Institutions, in any form or shape, are in direct contradiction to the CRPD and can never be homes for us. Inside institutions, our peers have reported being shackled, drugged, stripped, kept under surveillance, infantilized and silenced, often without any accountability. . Because society barely cares about women who are visible, why would it care about women who have been rendered invisible? In our member countries, we have heard about marriages annulled, child custody being taken away and property disputes settled by declaring a woman mad and locking her away.

Another gap in the realization of our rights is the limited solidarity from feminist and other social justice movements. We have often heard that no one wants to share the table with the "crazy ones." But we are building bridges, across disability, feminist, human rights and economic justice movements and we can see some good changes, because this work of imagining and building a truly inclusive work cannot be done alone.

Finally, I want to say this: these violations have been normalized for far too long. Because they have been mainstreamed, everything else is referred to as alternatives and that should not be the case. Through our OPDs work, we've seen that community owned and rights-based approaches work and work truly well. TCI members are creating inclusive neighbourhoods and strengthening social support systems, enabling supported decision making models, building peer support models, providing rights based support during crisis, and promoting access to employment, education, nutrition, housing, and health. We have seen programs mature and thrive when the CRPD is truly the foundation and it is persons with psychosocial disabilities and other marginalized, historically oppressed groups who lead the way and own the process!

The truth is, we already have examples of what works and how it works. What we need now is the will from stakeholders to truly uphold our rights, to invest in what actually works, and to

change the status quo. We are already doing the work. It's time for those with power to meet us there.

Let's not wait another 20 years to realize rights we already hold. Thank you.

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