



Statement at Side event: Disability and Democracy – Current Status and Challenges of International Cooperation for the Implementation of the UN CRPD

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Hello, my name is Silvestre, co-director of ALCE: Abolition of Punishment and Confinement, a Colombian organisation led by people with psychosocial disabilities, with a diverse and interdisciplinary team comprising people with lived experience and specialists in the human rights of people with disabilities.

I would like to begin by clarifying that this talk aims to provide a brief overview of the complexity of our region in relation to disability; however, due to time constraints, it will not be able to cover the subject in depth. Nevertheless, I hope it will serve as a catalyst, to spur us into making the changes we need to forge stronger alliances among people with disabilities across different regions.

In Colombia, the Convention has been enshrined in words and laws, yet society has ignored it and treated it as unattainable for the lived experiences of those of us living with disability, thereby failing to produce a comprehensive and sufficient document to address the gaps and inequalities faced by people with disabilities. This body of laws not only consolidates the human rights framework but also honours the memory of the disability rights activists who made this compilation possible.

Now, looking at the Latin American region, the Convention faces major challenges in terms of implementation, as the lack of political will, combined with Colombia's middle-income status, means that the Convention remains a medium- to long-term project, or one that is being achieved fragmenteably. For the complexities of the region are also marked by a strong centre/periphery, urban/rural divide, and minimal access to state recognition versus state neglect. Even so, the resilience of us, people with disabilities, continues to sustain this political project.

And a key element of this struggle has been the legal framework provided by Article 12 of the Convention, which succeeded in breaking with one of the greatest flaws of social ableism: the questioning of the autonomy of people with disabilities, which has led to our infantilisation, with guardianship being assumed as the only possible path; this is the prejudice that is most difficult to dismantle, beyond the scope of the law.

For the greatest challenge to our realities remains autonomy and who decides on it; as in most parts of the world, this is the daily struggle. For it bears the mark of a medicalised and ableist view of our bodies from which we have not been able to free ourselves, and it remains a field of contention.

Currently, in our region, our rights are once again at risk due to this bias that continues to pathologise our life experiences, with political initiatives being put forward that exclude us from

decision-making and cut funding for independent living and community-based support. Consequently, to conclude, I would like to pose a few questions that might help us overcome this challenge in the future.

How can we, at a political and practical level, centre life experiences as evidence-based narratives that enable us to move beyond the view of specialists as decision-makers?

Can we propose alternatives that offer options moving away from the medical system as the sole service for people with disabilities, especially in crisis response? The most vulnerable moment of people with psychosocial disabilities and when the most terrifying violence occurs

As the Global South, what alliances can we forge to establish social models of disability that are currently only seen as feasible in the Global North?

How can we strengthen the movement to ensure full political participation in state decision-making?

What steps must we take to ensure that life is sustained within the community, as an affective movement for life, which is not solely the responsibility of people with disabilities, but rather a school of interdependence that allows us all to flourish equally.
