

Opening statement: International co-operation: UNCRPD and the 2030 agenda for sustainable development

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I am pleased and grateful to be given the opportunity to speak to you as CEO of Christian Blind Mission Ireland. I would like to thank the Chair, Members, Deputies, Senators, and colleagues who are here today to discuss an issue very close to the mission of CBM Ireland, a disability focused organisation working in international development.

For this reason, Article 32 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which focuses on International Co-operation, points the signatories to the Convention towards the same mission as ourselves and puts commitments to disability rights beyond the local.

Article 32 directs international cooperation to be inclusive of persons with disabilities but this article should not be read in isolation from the rest of the CRPD. The CRPD itself provides a substantive articulation that disability rights are human rights but also what those rights entail. International cooperation has to be reflective of the CRPD in its totality in order to give disability the meaningful attention it deserves.

This reflection is also necessary as Ireland recommits to the global aims of the Sustainable Development Goals where the achievements in Ireland far outpace progress across much of the world. It should be a concern for all that while Ireland is achieving 80% of the SDGs on our own soil, globally only 15% of the targets are on track.

The role played by the Irish diplomatic team at the UN in brokering the recent Political Declaration on Sustainable Development, which aims to re-energise global commitments, is commendable. We congratulated An Tánaiste for Ireland's work in ensuring that the Declaration explicitly stated

that “persons with disabilities actively participate in and equally benefit from sustainable development efforts”.

Yet, I know from my 20 years working in development how easy it is to use the right words yet people with disabilities remain overlooked, often forgotten. I can only look back at my own work now and realise how little consideration I – and the organisations I worked with, as well as the wider ‘international community’ – gave to the needs and specific rights of people with disabilities. I didn’t know what I didn’t know. Often the need to do something, to do a lot, and do it quickly, means that the necessary time to find, to understand, and to respond to the specific needs, of persons with disability, means that they are excluded, even with the best intentions.

Ireland’s commitments under the SDGs combined with Article 32 requires that our international development commitments be inclusive of persons with disabilities. Yet, despite Ireland’s diplomatic efforts globally, our own *A Better World* policy for international development only mentions disabilities three times. In each of those references it is simply as part of a list of different groups to be included. It is important that people with disabilities are mentioned – otherwise they will be certainly overlooked – yet the references are cursory.

People with disabilities comprise 16% of global population - about 1.3 billion people worldwide. 80% of them live in the developing world. That is 1 billion people with the same rights as everyone but specific, and differentiated, needs to be able to achieve those rights. That is 1 billion people that are treated as a single – homogeneous – group, among a list of many.

People with disabilities are not homogeneous nor can they be a mere appendix. Different disabilities require different supports. We know this in Ireland. Yes, people with disabilities will also benefit from sustainable development through economic progress and social improvement, but there will be millions that will miss out while they wait for the rising tide to

raise all boats. Some will unfortunately drown while that tide rises without dedicated, targeted, investment in their inclusion in international co-operation.

There are 17 Sustainable Development Goals – these have 169 targets, yet only 7 of these specifically address disability inclusion. The SDGs have 231 indicators yet only 10 of these require disability data disaggregation and only 2 have available data to disaggregate.

Considering the pre-existing challenges that people with disabilities face relative to the majority of the population, considering they form a large minority of the population, considering the complexities and differential challenges people with different types of disabilities encounter, they remain almost invisible when looking at progress on achieving the SDGs.

In our SDG commitments, we must look beyond the brief articulation of what disability inclusion means under Article 32, and look to the CRPD as a whole.

The 1 billion people with disabilities need more than to be referenced as a homogeneous group, one group amongst many, not to be forgotten – but require a positive, dedicated strategy for their inclusion in international cooperation.

A deaf person is not the same as a blind person – who is not the same as someone with a psychosocial disability – who is not the same as someone who has a physical disability. What each person needs to access education (SDG4) is different; to enjoy decent work is different; to live in and enjoy sustainable cities is different.

This means moving beyond the minimalist approach taken in *A Better World*, and the essentially minimal commitments to measuring progress under the SDGs for people with disabilities.