

Remarks by Ms. Boram Lee, Disability Advisor, Women's Refugee Commission at the UN-Women Executive Board informal briefing on UN-Women's work and approach to achieve gender equality and empowerment of women and girls with disabilities

Wednesday, 12 September 2018

[As delivered]¹

Thank you to UN Women for the opportunity to provide an Informal Briefing to the Executive Committee. Hello everyone. My name is Boram Lee. I am here representing the Women's Refugee Commission. We are a research and advocacy organization that works to *improve* the lives and *protect* the rights of women, children, and youth- including with disabilities, that have been affected by conflict or crisis. We research their needs, identify solutions, and advocate for programs and policies that strengthen their resilience and drive change in humanitarian practice and policy.

It's my pleasure to be with you today to share with you some of our experiences working with women and girls with disabilities.

As we all know, women and girls with disabilities, making up an estimated 19% of the global population, face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination because of their gender, - their disability, - and in crisis contexts, - their refugee or undocumented status. These factors all add to their risk of violence, abuse and exploitation. *However*, where women and girls with disabilities are consulted, represented, and advocated on behalf of- through representative organizations of women with disabilities, we have seen member states, UN agencies, and civil society respond to and address the needs of women and girls with disabilities.

In related work undertaken by the WRC, we found humanitarian actors ill-equipped to effectively include women and girls with disabilities in their programs and services. They felt that they lacked the knowledge and experience to do this. And yet, the DPOs are there, on-the-ground – those who have the requisite skills and experience were not consulted or engaged in the humanitarian response. We attempted to bridge this divide and create links between these entities through the support provided by UN Women and the Australian Government. We were able to demonstrate that women-led DPOs can play a critical role in bridging the development – humanitarian divide in an emergency, but also in strengthening community resilience in situations of protracted crisis.

Pilot projects supporting regional networks of women with disabilities from South Asia through the South Asia Disability Forum and Africa partnering with the Network of African Women with Disabilities, opened up space and opportunities for women-led DPOs to advocate on issues of women and girls with disabilities in development, humanitarian and human rights forums at national, regional, and global levels.

¹ Webcast available at: <http://webtv.un.org/watch/empowerment-of-women-and-girls-with-disabilities/5834147781001/>.

Women with disabilities from across South Asia and Africa met in regional convenings where they were able to network and build alliances, share common experiences and issues of concern, and formulate advocacy messages on the inclusion of women and girls with disabilities in humanitarian and post-conflict agendas.

These messages were taken forward by women with disabilities to global advocacy events such as the World Humanitarian Summit, the Conference of State Parties, Association for Women in Development Forum, and the Commission on the Status of Women, where they spoke at high level meetings highlighting the need for humanitarian, development, and human rights duty-bearers to address the protection and empowerment of displaced women and girls with disabilities. At one such side event here at the UN, we organized a global meeting of women with disabilities together with UN Women, member states, and our partner organizations where mobilizing began to address the gender imbalance in the CRPD committee members elected- since then, member states elected six women to the committee this year.

Finally, at a national level, women with disabilities involved in the pilot project have been continuing their advocacy at national levels, building alliances to influence humanitarian actors such as UNHCR and their own governments highlighting issues of displaced women and girls with disabilities in human rights monitoring mechanisms, and promoting access to government policies and programs. As an example, UNHCR and other key humanitarian stakeholders have engaged Uganda pilot partner, the National Union of Women with Disabilities in Uganda, recognized for their advocacy, in the consultations to shape the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework follow-up. And there are many more examples like this.

These pilot projects demonstrate that grass-roots groups of women with disabilities from crisis-affected communities can and do successfully influence global and national policy and practice in humanitarian, development and human rights forums.

But building movements and alliances are not one-off activities; it requires global leadership and sustained support – a role that I believe UN Women is well-positioned to play. And that the Women’s Refugee Commission looks forward to supporting.

Thank you for your time.