



Arab Organization for  
Persons with Disabilities



وزارة الشؤون الاجتماعية  
Ministry Of Social Affairs



League Of Arab States  
Social Affairs Sector



Shared Prosperity Dignified Life



Side event on the sidelines of the conference COSP14 on **"Protecting the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Pandemics and Crises"** Expected to be held on June 14, 2021, via videoconference (**Concept note**)

## I. Background

Persons with disabilities in the Arab region are among the most weak population groups. Social and environmental barriers, discriminatory attitudes, and inaccessible infrastructure prevent them from attaining their maximum potentials. They are disproportionately affected by crises and disasters. Prolonged Israel's occupation of Palestine and its illegal closure and blockade of Gaza prevents Palestinians with disabilities from the full enjoyment of their rights.

Persons with disabilities are among the most marginalized in any crisis-affected community. Some surveys indicated that 75% of persons with disabilities living in a war situation reported a lack of access to basic assistance such as water, shelter, food, or health services. The HI/IMMAP survey carried out at the beginning of 2018 in urban and refugee areas identified approximately 22% of the population as persons with disabilities in Jordan and Lebanon.

Despite improvement made to the enrollment and retention of children in education across the Arab region, the poor enrollment of children with disabilities in education across the Arab region remains significant. This issue is further exasperated in conflict and humanitarian contexts, where educational provisions, when available, largely overlook the support needs of children with disabilities. The lockdown and closure of schools as a result of the current pandemic have inevitably further impacted the education of children with disabilities.

Broadly speaking, the COVID-19 pandemic came to sweep across all parts of the Arab world, causing many health, economic, social and educational crises for all Arab countries, similar to other countries in the world. The COVID-19 pandemic and its related socio-economic consequences magnify the barriers and inequalities that in normal circumstances face persons with disabilities especially children, women and older people. The pandemic constitutes a serious setback in the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The UNCRPD obligates States Parties to take, in accordance with their obligations under International Law, including International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law, “*all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including situations of armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies and the occurrence of natural disasters*” (UNCRPD, Article 11).

Today, persons with disabilities in the Arab world urgently need access to awareness-raising materials, health services, prevention tools, distance learning services, and economic and social support. Like other countries in the world, the Arab countries were surprised by the pandemic, and their reactions have been late and without planning. Many of their measures did not take into account the needs of persons with disabilities during the pandemic. Thus, there is an urgent need to develop a joint Arab Roadmap to face humanitarian and security crises and epidemics, which includes supporting the rights of persons with disabilities and preserving their lives during the difficult circumstances that our region may go through at any given time.

In view of these developments and within the implementation of the Council of Arab Ministers for Social Affairs resolution No. [917, (40th Ordinary Session), 12/17/2020], the League of Arab States (LAS) in collaboration with the State of Kuwait and ESCWA, and the Arab Organization of Persons with Disabilities, decided to organize a side event at the 14th session of the Conference of States Parties to the CRPD to facilitate a conversation between various stakeholders in order to clearly identify main challenges faced by persons with disabilities in Pandemics and Crises", and also introduce some practical CRPD-compliant solutions and strategies to address those challenges.

## **II. Objectives**

The objectives of this side event are:

- To discuss the need to establish a collaborative approach to protect the rights of persons with disabilities during armed conflicts and humanitarian emergencies and identify existing gaps and challenges in this regard;
- To share lessons learned, best experiences and good practices in the Arab Region and around the globe on how best persons with disabilities could be supported during armed conflicts and humanitarian emergencies, including Covid-19 pandemic and ways to improve the preparedness and responses of the Arab region in a similar crisis in the future.

## **III. Partners**

This event is being prepared and organized in cooperation between the League of Arab States and ESCWA, and in partnership with the State of Kuwait and the Arab Organization of Persons with Disabilities.

#### **IV. Speakers**

The list of the participants who will speak in this event contains:

The League of Arab States, ESCWA, the State of Kuwait, the Council of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs, the Special Rapporteur on disability, the International Disability Alliance, the United Nations Population Fund, the World Health Organization, the Arab Organization of Persons with Disabilities.