

**Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief
Coordinator, Mark Lowcock, Remarks to the Global Disability Summit**

Spotlight Session

**“From Promise to Practice: Increasing the voice, choice and control of persons with
disabilities in humanitarian response”**

London, Here East, Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park - 24 July 2018

[Greetings]

I am a great believer that a picture is worth a thousand words, and a talking movie is even better, so I want to begin by letting you see this video.

[[Video](#)]

I visited FONHARE three weeks ago as part of my first visit to Haiti. And only really wanted to make one point to you today, which is the point emphasized by Doctor Iven in the video, and it’s about inclusion.

This is a time of great challenge and opportunity when it comes to ensuring humanitarian action meets everyone’s needs and priorities.

More than 130 million people across the globe currently need humanitarian assistance. At least 15 per cent of them are people with disabilities.

Last year, conflict and natural disasters forcibly displaced more than 30 million people – a third of them were people with disabilities.

Humanitarian agencies, as you will hear during the session, are trying to do better in responding to these people’s needs.

The World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 called on us to move away from a “one size-fits all” approach to humanitarian action, to ensure we are better serving everybody’s needs, including people with disabilities, as well as other very vulnerable groups.

There is no silver bullet, but the central, fundamental requirement is to include disabled people and their organisations in planning for and implementing responses to humanitarian crises.

Disabled people need to be provided with a voice, so that they can identify their needs, express their views on priorities, evaluate services and advocate for change.

As someone familiar -- from my family's life -- with disability, I know that intellectually. But it is easy even for thoughtful and well-meaning humanitarian agencies to forget it in the middle of a crisis. The best way to guard against that is to include disabled people from the outset.

Ultimately, that is going to make for a better, more effective and humane response, which is what we all want.

And that is at the heart of Dr. Ivens' message from the video we have just watched.

He and his staff – people like Gabo Ivon, who used to be a carpenter and welder, and now, from his wheelchair, mobilizes the finances that keep FONHARE running – are the embodiment of how to do it.

To make progress with inclusion, Governments need to address disability rights in their national development plans.

As Emergency Relief Coordinator, supporting the work of all UN humanitarian agencies on humanitarian issues, Red Cross organisations, and countless NGOs around the world, I am also going to work to promote greater inclusion across the humanitarian community, at every level of preparedness and response.

My office, will ensure that in all our processes, in all of our systems and in all of our ways of working, we become more inclusive in the way we address the needs of people with disabilities.

We will seek the help of disabled people's own organisations, to ensure disability issues are included in every stage of the humanitarian programme cycle, and across humanitarian country teams.

To boost our own performance, we will retain a dedicated focal point to foster the inclusion of people with disabilities in our mandated activities.

We will work to gather better disaggregated data, so it is easier to identify people with disabilities, and make it freely available through our global Humanitarian Data Exchange programme.

OCHA's Centre for Humanitarian Data in The Hague is establishing a fellowship to overcome gaps in disability data. We know from UNHCR and others that 10 times as many people with disabilities are identified when appropriate questions are included in refugee registration interviews.

We will improve the guidance material available to humanitarian organisations to help them ensure the inclusion of people with disabilities. Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) are already helping us with that.

At the Inter-Agency Standing Committee level, a task team is also working on system-wide guidelines for the inclusion of people with disabilities in humanitarian action, to be finalised by early 2019. Over 100 representatives from 60 organisations, including many disabled people's organizations (DPOs), are participating in this process,

I look forward to working with DPOs and all of you to deliver on our vision of inclusive humanitarian action that helps realize the true potential of people with disabilities in crises across the world.

Thank you.