

UN disability rights committee opens with a call to spotlight gender issues

20 March 2017 – The United Nations committee monitoring efforts to protect rights of persons with disabilities today opened its spring session today in Geneva with a call to pay special attention to gender issues.

“We do urge you to ensure a strong gender basis is built in to your agenda this year, and we urge you to take special care to ensure that the voice and experience of girls and women resonates within your deliberations,” the UN’s Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, Kate Gilmore told the 17th session of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which runs 12 April.

Ms. Gilmore spoke on behalf of UN Secretary-General António Guterres, who has made gender parity and the equal representation of women a centrepiece of his term in office.

In this session, the Committee, consisting of 18 international independent experts, will review the rights of people with disabilities in the Republic of Moldova, Iran, Cyprus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Jordan, Armenia, Honduras and Canada.

These countries are among the 172 State Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which was adopted on 13 December 2006 by the General Assembly.

Rather than considering disability as an issue of medicine, charity or dependency, the CRPD challenges people worldwide to understand disability as a human rights issue.

It covers many areas where obstacles can arise, such as physical access to buildings, roads and transportation, and access to information through written and electronic communications while it also aims to reduce stigma and discrimination, which are often reasons why people with disabilities are excluded from education, employment and health and other services.

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There are around one billion people with disabilities in the world.

At today’s meeting, the Committee adopted its agenda and programme of work while newly elected members of the Committee were sworn in.

The fact that only one woman has been elected by Member States to serve on the Committee is “fundamentally not appropriate,” Ms. Gilmore said, urging Member States to “rectify this unacceptable situation” at the next elections.