

**Keynote welcome remarks at the opening side-event on the  
situation of persons with disabilities in armed conflicts**

**(open VTC)**

**28 May, 3:00 pm**

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

*Thank you for this warm greeting.*

I would like to warmly greet the sponsors of this event – *United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS)*, Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, and the United Kingdom Permanent Mission to the United Nations.

My cordial greetings also go to the representatives of organisations which cooperated to organize this event: Ms Bahia Zrikem, *Humanitarian Policy Coordinator for Syria, Humanity and Inclusion*, and Mr Elham Youssefian, *Inclusive Humanitarian Action and Disaster Risk Reduction Advisor in the International Disability Alliance Secretariat*.

Let me also welcome Ms Catalina Devandas Aguilar, UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities who is moderating today's meeting and the speakers and guests of this event.

Today's *side-event* marks the Protection of Civilians Week. Its main objective is to outline special challenges faced by persons with disabilities in humanitarian and armed crises, or post-conflict reconciliation.

Almost a year after the adoption by the UN Security Council of a landmark Resolution 2475 that had been put forward by Great Britain and Poland, the speakers' task will be to identify loopholes in the POC's agenda with reference to the persons with disabilities, as well as to present innovative solutions that are designed to implement both at the international and national level.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

As highlighted in this year's report of the UN Secretary-General on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, such conflicts have particularly disruptive influence on persons with disabilities. For instance, in Yemen, such persons have limited access to health services, education, and employment.

Organisations dealing with integration of persons with disabilities have to face barriers in providing basic services, due to delays in supplying aid and cuts in its financing. Persons with disabilities often live in inhuman and indeed disgraceful conditions, and when confronted with life threatening situations or imminent violence, their possibilities for escape are limited.

Adopting the UN Security Council Resolution 2475 (2019) was merely the first step in providing persons with disabilities with equal access to basic services in conflict zones.

The Resolution has three main objectives:

Firstly, to raise awareness of the need to involve persons with disabilities in humanitarian initiatives, conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction processes, and post-conflict reconciliation;

Secondly, to underline the significance of broadening knowledge on the needs and rights of persons with disabilities in peace keeping missions and

Thirdly, to improve the reporting system on persons with disabilities.

Today's speakers, drawing on their own experience, will focus, on *Inter-agency Standing Committee guidelines on inclusion of persons with disabilities in Humanitarian Action* as well as on barriers hampering crisis management, faced by organisations of the persons with disabilities.

The speakers will present the testimonies of those affected in the conflicts in Syria, Yemen, or Iraq, and bring us closer to innovative programmes dedicated to the persons with hearing impairments, including children, within the framework of preventive education on threats posed by mines.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Poland implements projects related to persons with disabilities under development aid programmes. Our regular donation to UNMAS for the project *Mitigation of threat posed by the presence of explosive hazards in Gaza* supports the victims of mines, improvised explosive devices and after-war explosive remnants of war.

Last year we backed UNMAS *Safe Ground* campaign aiming at helping the victims of mines in the areas of armed conflicts.

We would like to underline a particular significance of risk education as an element of prevention and awareness raising among local communities, and the necessity to provide broad access to medical services.

*Thank you very much for your attention and I wish you a fruitful discussion on that very important subject.*