



Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

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Summary record of the 8th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 7 October 2010, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Yang Jia (Vice-Chairperson)
later: Mr. Chowdhury
later: Mr. McCallum (Chairperson)
later: Mr. Al-Tarawneh

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In the absence of Mr. McCallum (Chairperson), Ms. Yang Jia (China) took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Day of general discussion on article 9 (continued)

Session II

1. **The Chairperson** drew attention to the topic of the session II discussion, which was the right to access on an equal basis with others to virtual and material information and communication. The topic would be examined in relation to four specific areas: the formulation of inclusive policies; the development of international standards, in particular for Internet accessibility; international cooperation and partnerships; and efforts to increase public awareness about existing opportunities to enhance the accessibility of information and communications for persons with disabilities.
2. Recounting her own experience as a blind person, she said that the academic and career successes she had achieved were attributable to the assistive technologies she had used. Those had initially included synthetic speech systems and later, more sophisticated programmes, such as JAWS and Kurzweil software applications.
3. Contrary to the beliefs of some, she was of the firm opinion that there were many opportunities to make tangible and immediate progress in increasing the accessibility of assistive technologies. In 2008, in cooperation with the national library system in China, she had advocated and launched a national digital library for the blind that was currently serving persons with other disabilities as well. She was interested in developing an institute devoted to research on accessibility for persons with disabilities, which would help to spread awareness that access to information and communications for persons with disabilities was indeed a right under the Convention.
4. **Mr. Leblois** (Global Initiative for Inclusive ICTs) said that the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) had increased dramatically in the past several decades, as testified, *inter alia*, by the fact that there were currently more than 5 billion mobile phones and more than 2 billion Internet users throughout the world. The failure to make such widely used technologies accessible to persons with disabilities amounted to excluding them from essential services, contents, social interaction and government website applications, to mention only a few.
5. At the same time, vast opportunities were available for using technology to serve persons with disabilities. Assistive technologies already existed for virtually every category of ICTs. The problem was that their availability was limited. That was due to a general lack of awareness of the problem, the failure to develop effective policies, a lag in the implementation of technological innovation, a lack of standardization between the various systems and platforms and inadequate training for disabled persons in how to use them. Global standardization was particularly important since it was necessary in order to develop mass-produced products that could be offered at a reduced cost.
6. It was noteworthy that article 9 of the Convention gave equal weight to the obligation of States parties to ensure access to information and communications and the obligations of ensuring access to the physical environment and to transportation. Moreover, article 9 expressly provided that such access included not only information and communications but also their related technologies and systems.
7. Such express reference to the accessibility of communications technologies (ICTs) meant that all sector-specific provisions of the Convention that mentioned the terms “accessible”, “accessibility” or “reasonable accommodation” gave rise to direct obligations for States parties to ensure access to the relevant ICT application for the sector concerned.

The Convention therefore provided a strong legal basis for the obligations embodied in article 9.

8. There were a number of other provisions in the Convention that also supported ICT accessibility. They included a mandate for States parties to promote general research and development, establish accessibility standards and promote new media and the use of the Internet for persons with disabilities. Compliance with such a complex set of provisions required the involvement of many different stakeholders in each State party.

9. There were several ways in which international cooperation could help to promote the accessibility of information and communications technologies. The first concerned a review of the accessibility of each State party's information infrastructure. Since, in most countries, the information infrastructure was the responsibility of a single telecommunications regulation authority, a review of accessibility provided an opportunity to make big changes that involved only a small number of operators and policymakers. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) was the United Nations specialized agency that brought together the national telecommunications regulators from member States and was thus the key channel through which those regulators could be influenced.

10. The second area of international cooperation with regard to implementing ICT accessibility obligations concerned access to contents. The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) had drafted a treaty on improved access for blind, visually impaired and other reading disabled persons that was expected to be adopted in the near future.

11. The third area of international cooperation in implementing ICT accessibility related to the promotion of assistive technologies; however, such cooperation was hampered by the lack of programmes to train persons with disabilities in their use. The ministries of education, labour and health were best suited to developing widespread and effective programmes, since they oversaw education, the workplace and rehabilitation, respectively.

12. The fourth area of international cooperation in implementing ICT accessibility was standardization. It was crucial to lowering costs and ensuring the interoperability of assistive technologies and information technology, in general. Many efforts to ensure standardization in the field of accessibility for persons with disabilities were already being carried by various international standards organizations.

13. The fifth area of international cooperation was public procurement, which should be seen as a major policy tool to promote standards and influence ICT vendors. States parties should be required to use public procurement as a means of providing incentives to the private sector for the development of assistive technology products. In that connection, the Telecommunications and Electronic and Information Technology Advisory Committee (TEITAC) of the United States of America had embarked on a process to develop minimum standards for public procurement. All countries should be encouraged to participate in that process.

14. In February 2010, in conjunction with ITU, the Global Initiative for Inclusive ICTs had produced an e-accessibility policy toolkit for persons with disabilities. It had also organized capacity-building programmes in cooperation with international institutions, Governments and academia. The programmes were important because they highlighted many of the issues and obstacles faced by persons with disabilities and revealed a general lack of understanding of their situation. For that reason, all capacity-building programmes for policymakers should rely on the participation of persons with disabilities.

15. One of the various reports published by the Global Initiative for Inclusive ICTs and available for downloading from its website was the "ICT Accessibility Self-Assessment Framework". It was intended to enable policymakers to evaluate their country's compliance with the Convention in matters relating to ICT accessibility. That publication had translated

each provision of the Convention into the practical programmes that a State party would ideally have if full effect was given to the Convention.

16. The Global Initiative for Inclusive ICTs had conducted a survey in 2010 of 31 States parties, which accounted for some 75 per cent of the combined population of the existing 90 States parties. The purpose of the survey was to take stock of progress made by States parties in ensuring ICT accessibility obligations under the Convention and to identify any related gaps in implementation. Fifty-seven data points had been selected from among those included in the self-assessment framework, which had been used to assess each State party's level of commitment, ability to implement policies and record of results.

17. The results of the survey showed that some 91 per cent of the countries had a constitutional article, law or regulation that defined the rights of persons with disabilities, while some 72 per cent had a definition of "reasonable accommodation" in their laws or regulations on the rights of persons with disabilities. Those results showed that considerable progress had been made, a situation that was attributable, in his view, to the joint publication in 2007 of the *Handbook for Parliamentarians on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), with input from his organization regarding sections on ICTs. The publication of the handbook and its results demonstrated that a well-coordinated initiative could indeed produce results. Nonetheless, much work still needed to be done, given that only 56 per cent of the States parties surveyed had a definition of accessibility in their domestic law that included ICTs or electronic media.

18. With regard to government policies and programmes to promote ICT accessibility, some 66 per cent of the States parties surveyed had laws, policies or programmes that ensured the consultation of persons with disabilities in the development of legislation; some 59 per cent provided information and services in accessible and usable formats for persons with disabilities; and 35 per cent had formulated a public procurement rules policy that promoted accessible ICTs. Since only 56 per cent of the States parties surveyed had rules for accessible television or Internet for disabled persons and since less than half of them had such rules for all the other information and communication technologies, the area of information infrastructure was perhaps the one that offered the most immediate opportunity for improvement. As to policies covering ICT accessibility, the area in which the greatest percentage of States parties had carried out such policies was education.

19. One of the key findings of the survey was the limited capacity of States parties to implement the provisions of the Convention. For example, some 97 per cent of those surveyed had a government institution specifically responsible for persons with disabilities, but only 41 per cent defined, promoted or monitored accessibility standards for ICTs. The most blatant weakness in States parties' capacity to implement the ICT-related provisions of the Convention was the fact that only 13 per cent of those surveyed made statistics or data available to the general public concerning digital access by persons with disabilities, and only 9 per cent had mandatory training programmes at the university level for future professionals about such digital access. Moreover, none of those that did provide such data or programmes were member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

20. The general conclusions to be drawn from the survey were that gaps in the general legal framework relating to ICT accessibility were steadily being filled, but that the formulation of ICT accessibility policies and programmes were lagging significantly. Reasons for States parties' limited capacity to implement the Convention included inadequate budget allocations, a lack of relevant data on the subject and the failure to involve persons with disabilities in the policymaking process. Lastly, ICT accessibility

policies and programmes should be further developed in areas identified through benchmarking, self-assessment and survey results as areas of obvious weakness.

21. In conclusion, he recommended that the Committee should promote the existing knowledge-sharing tools and programmes of various organizations and ensure that all organizations of persons with disabilities and Governments were aware of them. The Committee should establish a minimum set of data for countries to report on and encourage States parties to accelerate and fund capacity-building programmes for policymakers, giving priority to areas with the greatest room for improvement. Moreover, the Committee should request the standards development organizations to submit an annual report on progress made in the development and effective implementation of ICT accessibility standards. Lastly, it should closely monitor the WIPO negotiations for the draft treaty on improved access for blind, visually impaired and other reading disabled persons, in order to ensure the conformity of the latter with article 30, paragraph 3, of the Convention.

22. **Mr. Peterson** (World Federation of the Deaf), speaking in sign language, indicated that accessibility was of the utmost importance to the deaf community, particularly in the current information age. Citing the philosopher John Rawls' theory of justice, he argued that a society that ensured the right of access to information, communications, the physical environment and transportation on the basis of equality with others would be one based on universal design.

23. For the deaf community, accessibility depended on the availability of interpretation services. There must also be respect for and recognition of national sign languages, which were as natural as spoken languages, and deaf culture and identity. Accessibility was akin to the basic human right to freedom of speech. Unfortunately, that right was often not observed in everyday life. Deaf people faced obstacles in communicating directly with people unfamiliar with sign language and in gaining access to information in that form in the news media, the Internet, awareness campaigns and official documents. In Norway, the lack of information in sign language largely accounted for the very low voter turnout among deaf people.

24. A 2009 World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) survey had found that 13 out of 93 countries did not have sign language interpreters. Furthermore, many of the existing interpreters lacked professional training. The difficulties in finding qualified sign language interpreters directly affected accessibility to other services, information and education. Written texts were often inaccessible to deaf people, because they lacked the necessary education. According to WFD, some 90 per cent of deaf people were illiterate, which made it imperative to provide official documents in sign language, especially containing information on health and education. Only a few countries such as Thailand, however, produced official documents in the national sign language. As radio was inaccessible to deaf people, public television was the most effective means of providing information and news. Yet very few countries provided sign language interpretation of news and current affairs television programmes.

25. The lack of access to public information on health and safety issues in sign language also posed a threat to the well-being and lives of deaf people, as was demonstrated during the earthquakes in Haiti and Chile. Another case in point was the lack of urgently needed HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns aimed at deaf people and deaf associations.

26. While the deaf community had been quick to embrace the latest technologies, it still lacked access to many new technologies. For instance, Web television seldom provided captions or interpretation. New technologies must therefore be adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities. While bus announcements via a monitor might be suitable for deaf people, they were useless for blind persons. Legislation must thus ensure that new technologies did not set up new barriers. The technologies should be used to pave the way

towards a more accessible and inclusive society, in which all people were able to act as informed and responsible citizens.

27. **Ms. Hodgkin** (Australia) said that her Government was developing a national disability strategy that would establish a framework to promote, protect and monitor the implementation of the Convention. The National People with Disabilities and Carer Council was established to provide expert advice to Government on the development and implementation of the strategy. The Council had prepared a report on the key barriers and issues facing people with disabilities. A clear message that emerged from nationwide consultations was that access to information was of vital importance to people with disabilities, their families and their carers to help them live independent lives.

28. Her Government funded two organizations to provide information and accessible media to persons with disabilities. In addition, policies requiring departments and agencies to caption all television commercials and public information videos were in place at all levels of government. All Government departments and agencies and any individual or organization maintaining a webpage on an Australian server must abide by common standards and minimum online requirements and ensure that their websites were accessible to persons with disabilities.

29. A complaint filed with a national human rights institution against the Sydney Organizing Committee of the Olympic Games in 1999 for non-compliance of its website with accessibility requirements under the law had been substantiated and considerable damages had been awarded. That was a lesson for all organizations and countries hosting large events and an example of the importance of independent monitoring bodies.

30. Public and private information providers alike must be encouraged to use the existing international guidelines for web accessibility set out under the Global Initiative for Inclusive ICTs. Accessible web design not only increased access to persons with disabilities but also lowered costs for providers and allowed access to persons in areas with low bandwidth. The challenge to be met was to raise awareness about the advantages of accessibility over the worldwide web.

31. **Ms. Richardson** (New Zealand) said that New Zealand sign language had been one of the country's three official languages since 2006. Persons who were deaf had the right to use New Zealand sign language in legal proceedings.

32. Government departments were required to implement the New Zealand disability strategy, which included the objective of making all information and communication methods offered to the public available in formats appropriate to the different needs of persons with disabilities. Her Government had prepared a range of toolkits and guides on accessibility, including guides on working with sign language interpreters and translating documents into easily readable formats.

33. In addition, all government agencies were required to follow accessibility standards, including websites accessible to persons with disabilities, in accordance with articles 9 and 21 of the Convention. Accessible means of communication were also provided at the local government level, as evidenced during the recent earthquake in Christchurch, where a website for deaf persons provided updates on the disaster in a variety of formats.

34. **Mr. Gould** (Global Initiative for Inclusive ICTs) said that the Committee should consider requesting States to provide common core reporting data in the light of the challenges faced by the Committee itself in gaining access to clear and focused information. An example of that kind of common data had been presented earlier by G3ict and there might be others. States and non-governmental and international organizations should thus be involved in developing a standard set of benchmarks for the status of implementation of each of the major provisions of the Convention.

35. **Mr. Osamu** (Inclusion International) said that for persons with intellectual disabilities States parties and other stakeholders must apply a standard of accessibility that goes beyond physical and sensory accessibility. Services and environments should be adapted to their needs. Stakeholders in the area of education, health care and justice, such as teachers, doctors, police officers, policy makers and lawyers, required training so that persons with disabilities could have access to such mainstream services on an equal basis with others. Services must be organized to include all persons with disabilities and communications must be delivered in formats that were easy to read and understand.

36. **Ms. Cisternas Reyes**, highlighting some of the points made, said that the development of new technologies accessible to all was crucial for the full exercise of human rights. Economic growth went hand in hand with social development. The State, civil society and industry all had a role to play in ensuring that information and communication technologies promoted the social development of persons with disabilities in accordance with the Convention. There was a need for international standards of access and accessibility for such persons, which manufacturers must take into consideration when developing new technologies. Accessibility touched on all aspects of life and entailed fundamental rights, including freedom of expression. Another crucial issue to be tackled was bridging the digital gap and promoting universal digital literacy. Access to information and communication technologies must not be considered a luxury to be enjoyed by some, but a basic right.

The meeting was suspended at 4.20 p.m. and resumed at 4.35 p.m.

Session III

37. *Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh) took the Chair.*

38. **Ms. Lord** (Disability Awareness, Rights and Education) said that no one could enjoy a human right to which they did not have access; barriers preventing persons with disabilities from fully enjoying their human rights were everywhere. Although a wide variety of international instruments, including environmental law and human rights law, addressed different dimensions of accessibility, the Convention was both the most comprehensive and the most important in that regard. It was not only relevant to the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities; it was a core human rights instrument that strengthened the rights of all persons. The work of the Committee to establish accessibility obligations was therefore relevant to the interpretation of accessibility provisions for all persons and to the work of other treaty bodies.

39. Accessibility was mentioned throughout the Convention but its meaning and relationship to other core concepts within the Convention were not entirely clear. Hence, it was interpreted in different ways by different people. It was clear, however, that accessibility was a key element of each specific right in the Convention.

40. Four dimensions of accessibility had been set out by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in its general comment No. 14: non-discrimination, physical accessibility, economic accessibility (affordability) and accessibility of information (including the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas). Those dimensions would be useful to the Committee in its work on accessibility.

41. It could be useful for the Committee to consider the implications of accessibility as a general principle, for example its role in national plans and policies on disability, the work of legislatures and Governments, and budgeting and resource allocation at all levels. Assessing accessibility and integrating the results of disability-access audits into the development of law, policy and practice, in conjunction with persons with disabilities and their representative organizations, were key to implementing article 9 of the Convention.

42. To some, inaccessible environments were a form of discrimination. The Convention imposed limited obligations on States to combat that discrimination, but failure to achieve all the obligations outlined in article 9 was not a form of discrimination in itself. However, article 9 did not go far enough in describing the circumstances under which a failure to meet the accessibility duty would constitute discrimination, so clarification of that would assist States parties to meet their obligations under that article.

43. Barriers to accessibility were many and varied and, to assist States in implementing article 9, the Committee might wish to consider drafting a general comment to provide illustrative examples of how various barriers (physical, institutional as well as those related to information and attitudes) impinged upon specific disability rights.

44. Many of the obligations under the Convention required resources and extensive systemic change. Planning was necessary to implement many of the measures contained in article 9, and a general comment on that subject could be useful. A general comment could also be drafted to explain to States parties whether article 9 imposed specific duties with regard to promoting accessibility in the private housing sector and to outline the scope of their duties towards measures such as building and planning permission regulations and procurement policies.

45. Universal design and reasonable accommodation were important concepts related to accessibility. It would be useful for the Committee to clarify the relationship between the two. Usability and availability were other concepts that could be explained by the Committee in a general comment.

46. Article 9 was intended to inform and assist in the interpretation and implementation of all the human rights set out in the Convention. As an example of the implementation of the rights of persons with disabilities to participate in political and public life (art. 29), in Jordan organizations were working to ensure equal access to polling stations in the forthcoming elections and were challenging the way assistance was provided at those stations. Currently, voters requiring assistance, for example because they were blind, had to make a declaration of illiteracy and then whisper the name of their chosen candidate to the election committee member. Such a process was neither secret nor independent, and did not represent equal accessibility.

47. Article 4 required States parties to incorporate the obligations of the Convention into their national law, policy and programming, and to consult with and involve persons with disabilities in developing and implementing legislation and policies and in decision-making processes, including the formulation of accessibility standards. The Committee might wish to highlight that in a general comment and to consider the implications of article 4 for reinforcing the legislative duties set out in article 9.

48. **Ms. Hodgkin** (Australia) said that Governments, national human rights institutions and non-governmental organizations should all work together to ensure that obligations under the Convention were met. Australia recognized the importance of enhancing accessibility for persons with disabilities to enable them to participate fully in all aspects of life. The Australian Government had enacted minimum national standards on access to public transport, education and public buildings. The Australian Human Rights Commission advised on the development of such standards and monitored and reported on their implementation. It also investigated Government practices or acts that could be inconsistent with the rights in the Convention and promoted understanding and acceptance of those rights. The Attorney-General's Department and the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs were the joint focal points within Government for matters relating to the implementation of the Convention. Australia could do more and it continued to work in partnership with people with disabilities to overcome obstacles to equality, including in the area of accessibility.

49. **Mr. Ginnerup** (Denmark), speaking also on behalf of all the countries involved in establishing the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) standard on accessibility and usability of the built environment, said that the standard would be available from 2011. It was designed to be used in conjunction with the Convention and had incorporated suggestions from countries throughout the world on the minimum requirements for accessibility in the built environment. It would be used by many countries as a benchmark for their national standards and had already been used in the European Union to identify gaps in legislation and as part of considerations on establishing a European standard. Efforts were being undertaken to make information relevant to the ISO standard freely available on the Internet so that NGOs and developing countries would have access to it. He hoped that it would be widely used and applied.

50. **Ms. Diamond** (World Blind Union) said that, for blind people, access to the built environment, public transport and health-care services was as important as access to information and communication. Technological developments had made it possible for persons with disabilities, in particular blind people, to access information and to communicate. However, the equipment and software were often expensive and most blind people, including in the most developed countries, were unemployed and could not afford them. Accessibility needed to be linked to other articles of the Convention, ensuring that it was considered from a broad perspective that included education, employment and training. She asked the Committee to support the WIPO treaty on improved access for blind, visually impaired and other reading disabled persons.

51. **Mr. Cattani** (European Disability Forum) said that the one-minute limitation on statements of representatives of persons with disabilities was inappropriate given the importance of the issues at stake. In Europe, his organization was alarmed by an increase in all forms of discrimination, including against persons with disabilities. Certain political parties had made extremely negative statements against human and social diversity, claiming that the rights of persons with disabilities must be limited by economic sustainability and cultural traditions. Unacceptable pretexts were also used by some States parties to explain their inaction. A cross-cutting and evolving issue, accessibility had yet to be made a priority by European Governments, nor was it a reality for most persons with disabilities in the world. New barriers were emerging, such as silent vehicles and shared surface streets, which impacted the mobility of visually impaired people. Achievement of universal accessibility was hampered by such factors as prejudice, ignorance, rigid mindsets, reluctance and sheer refusal, as well as unemployment, denial of accommodation, cultural exclusion, segregated education, new inaccessible media and technologies, and exclusion from most household devices. It was crucial to take account of that hard reality, and of the discrimination most persons with disabilities continued to face. Joined by **Ms. Sarb** (SCOPE), he stressed that accessibility was a prerequisite for the enjoyment of all other rights.

52. **Ms. Sarb** (SCOPE) said that her organization provided a wide range of services for persons with disabilities. It had participated in the Convention ratification campaign for the United Kingdom and looked forward to contributing to the Committee's work by monitoring national implementation efforts. Research conducted by SCOPE had revealed that up to 20 per cent of persons with communication impairment in the United Kingdom were forced to wait more than a year for vital equipment.

53. **Ms. Mulligan** (International Disability and Development Consortium (IDDC)) said that international development and cooperation must ensure respect for the full human rights of every person, acknowledge diversity and promote poverty eradication. All development processes must be inclusive of persons with disabilities that entailed their meaningful participation in all phases of the development cycle. The recent outcome document of the High-Level Plenary Meeting of the sixty-fifth session of the General

Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals referred repeatedly to “removing barriers” to ensure accessibility of health, education and poverty-reduction programmes.

54. **Ms. Minkowitz** (World Network of Users and Survivors of Psychiatry (WNUP), a member of the International Disability Alliance (IDA)) said that discrimination against persons with psychosocial disabilities created barriers to access to all aspects of community life. Such people often had difficulties requesting reasonable accommodation of their specific needs, since requests for assistance were often met with negative responses.

55. **Mr. Gurbai** (Mental Disability Advocacy Center) said that removing physical barriers was necessary, but not sufficient. People with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities tended to be excluded from States’ accessibility agendas. Article 9 was a cross-cutting, rather than stand-alone provision related to article 12, which obliged States parties to ensure access to legal support. Since supported decision-making was not accessible to all persons who required it, the full and effective implementation of the Convention was not being achieved.

56. **Ms. Peláez Narváez** (Resource person for session III) said that the discussion had provided many useful suggestions for the Committee’s consideration. She wished to draw attention, however, to the particularly serious situation of women and children with disabilities. The lack of any specific reference to that group in article 9 could explain why it was often ignored in such discussions. Women with disabilities tended to be the poorest in the world, suffering from multiple discrimination, as well as lack of access to transport, education, employment, information and communications technology. She appealed to States and civil society to take proper account of their specific needs by promoting positive action, access to information, the identification of indicators and the collection of appropriately disaggregated data.

57. **The Chairperson** said that his was a developing country where no less than 10 per cent of the population suffered some form of disability. Many of the technical and other innovations discussed would not see the light of day within members’ lifetimes unless article 32 (international cooperation) was meaningfully and effectively implemented by all.

58. *Mr. McCallum, Chairperson, took the Chair.*

59. **The Chairperson** invited the Rapporteurs to make brief concluding statements.

60. **Ms. Maina** (Rapporteur, session I) said that session I had focussed on the need to ensure accessibility for persons who displayed no physical manifestations of disability, the technology currently available for persons with visual impairment, the importance of monitoring the application of accessibility standards, and the need to ensure that users themselves were consulted during the introduction of adaptive facilities.

61. **Mr. Könczei** (Rapporteur, session II), recalling key points of the discussion, said that Ms. Jia Yang had spoken of her own professional success achieved thanks to adaptive computer technology for the blind. Technological success stories included free Internet libraries for the blind established in China and Hungary. In modern information societies, groups lacking access to adaptive information technologies were increasingly excluded, however, from essential services. The discussion had also highlighted the cross-cutting nature of article 9, including its linkages with articles 5, 8, 13 and 19. Speakers had emphasized that the concept of “universal design” was based on the democratic principle that all persons should be able to use the same devices, irrespective of difference. The representatives of Australia, New Zealand and Inclusion International had described positive examples of accessibility and the resource person for the discussion had stressed the importance of universal access of all services and devices for all persons without discrimination.

62. In order to help the Committee provide guidance to States, it had been suggested that States should be asked whether they had an appropriately resourced accessibility strategy in place for information and communications technologies. They should also be asked whether they were developing inclusive policies to improve information access, whether they supported national and international cooperation to promote accessibility and whether they were raising awareness of existing opportunities and facilities.

63. **Mr. Lallahom** (Rapporteur, session III) said that Ms. Lord had provided a comprehensive overview of accessibility as related to the articles of the Convention and other relevant instruments. She had stressed the importance of an accessible rural as well as urban environment, accessible transport, universal design and decent housing. The representative of Australia had highlighted three series of accessibility standards being developed with civil society collaboration by her Government, while the Danish university representative had drawn attention to a new ISO standard for persons with disabilities. The representative of the World Blind Union had spoken of the need to ensure that information and communication technologies were adapted to the needs of blind persons. She had drawn attention to the fact that 75 per cent of blind adults in the world were unemployed and that less than 10 per cent of blind children attended school. The representative of the European Disability Forum had voiced his organization's concern about political unease over disability issues, while Ms. Peláez Narváez had highlighted the specific needs of women with disabilities, and the predominant effect on women of the digital divide. The last speaker had stressed the importance of ensuring inclusion and access for users and survivors of psychiatric treatment.

64. *Mr. Al-Tarawneh (Jordan) took the Chair.*

65. **The Chairperson** said that the day of general discussion on the right to accessibility had been most fruitful and would provide useful guidelines for the preparation of a general comment on accessibility. The texts of NGO statements that had not been fully delivered owing to time constraints would be made available on the Committee's website. At issue was not only physical access to buildings and public transport, but also access to equal, non-segregated education, to political and community life and to employment. There was clearly no alternative to accessibility, whatever the cost, and no right could be excluded, least of all the right to autonomy and independence. Investments were needed both to adapt infrastructure and to shift attitudes. In some countries, the Internet was viewed as a public good; in many, accessibility was hampered by copyright restrictions. He wished to applaud the WIPO initiative, which sought to ease those restrictions and make information available in accessible formats, especially in the developing world. Given that reservations to article 9 of the Convention were prohibited and that denial of accessibility constituted a serious violation of the principle of non-discrimination, countries should take steps to adapt existing legislation.

66. **Mr. Salama** (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)), welcoming the useful exchange of ideas, said that there was general agreement that accessibility was a cornerstone for ensuring implementation of all other rights of persons with disabilities, that article 9 covered both public and private actors and that a gender perspective was needed with regard to accessibility.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.