



# Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

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## Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

### Concluding observations on the initial report of the Lao People's Democratic Republic\*

#### I. Introduction

1. The Committee considered the initial report of the Lao People's Democratic Republic<sup>1</sup> at its 604th and 605th meetings,<sup>2</sup> held on 29 and 30 August 2022, respectively. It adopted the following concluding observations at its 618th meeting, held on 7 September 2022.
2. The Committee welcomes the initial report of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, which was prepared in accordance with the Committee's reporting guidelines, and thanks the State party for its written replies<sup>3</sup> to the list of issues prepared by the Committee.<sup>4</sup>
3. The Committee appreciates the constructive dialogue held with the State party's high-level delegation, which included representatives of relevant government ministries.

#### II. Positive aspects

4. The Committee notes with appreciation the measures taken by the State party to implement the Convention since its ratification in 2009, including the legislative measures taken to promote the rights of persons with disabilities, in particular the adoption of the following:
  - (a) Law No. 57 on persons with disabilities (10 December 2018), replacing Decree No. 137 with a more detailed and expansive protection of the rights of persons with disabilities;
  - (b) Law No. 74 on sport and physical activities (25 November 2019);
  - (c) Law No. 16 on performing arts (4 May 2017);
  - (d) Constitution, amended No. 63 (8 December 2015);
  - (e) Law No. 56 on preventing and combating violence against women and children (23 December 2014).
5. The Committee notes with appreciation the measures taken to establish a public policy framework for promoting the rights of persons with disabilities, including the adoption or establishment of:
  - (a) The national policy, strategy and action plan on disabled persons for the period 2020–2030, which defines eight key areas: raising public awareness; data and statistics;

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\* Adopted by the Committee at its twenty-seventh session (15 August–6 September 2022).

<sup>1</sup> [CRPD/C/LAO/1](#).

<sup>2</sup> See [CRPD/C/SR.604](#) and [CRPD/C/SR.605](#).

<sup>3</sup> [CRPD/C/LAO/RQ/1](#).

<sup>4</sup> [CRPD/C/LAO/Q/1](#).



healthcare; accessibility of the physical environment, information, communications and services; work and employment, including technical and vocational education and training; social protection; participation in cultural life, recreation and sports; and disability-inclusive governance;

(b) The national action plan on disabled persons for the period 2026–2030, which is aimed at increasing the employment rate of persons with disabilities;

(c) The Disability-Inclusive Development Working Group, in 2018;

(d) The national strategy and action plan on inclusive education policy for the period 2011–2015;

(e) The Incheon Strategy to “Make the Right Real” for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific, in 2012;

(f) The National Fund for Disabled Persons;

(g) The ninth national socioeconomic development plan;

(h) The implementation of mobile clinics.

### **III. Principal areas of concern and recommendations**

#### **A. General principles and obligations (arts. 1–4)**

6. The Committee is concerned that:

(a) Disability-related legislation and policies have not been fully harmonized in line with the Convention, including derogatory terms to refer to persons with intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities, including “persons who lost their intellect”, “persons who lost their mind” and “crazy persons”, and the confusion between the terms of “disability” and “amputation”;

(b) The medical model of disability is still prevalent in the State party, including within its disability assessment system and in relation to the eligibility criteria for accessing necessary services and support measures;

(c) There is a lack of a twin-track approach in legislation and public policies;

(d) Persons with disabilities, through their representative organizations, have limited involvement in consultations concerning legislation and public policies related to them, and that the duties of the National Committee for Persons with Disabilities are not clearly distinguished;

(e) Reprisals have been reported against civil society organizations for their advocacy work on the rights of persons with disabilities;

(f) The State party has not yet ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention.

**7. The Committee encourages the State party to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention. In addition, recalling its general comment No. 7 (2018) on the participation of persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, through their representative organizations, in the implementation and monitoring of the Convention, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

**(a) Review the existing disability-related legislation and policies and align them with the Convention, including through eliminating derogatory language regarding persons with disabilities;**

**(b) Ensure that its disability assessment systems are based on the human rights model of disability aimed at the assessment of legal and environmental barriers to persons with disabilities and the provision of the necessary support and assistance to promote the independent living of persons with disabilities and their social inclusion;**

(c) **Adopt a twin-track approach by mainstreaming the rights of persons with disabilities across all national action plans and strategies, and by adopting targeted and monitored measures aimed specifically at supporting and empowering persons with disabilities;**

(d) **Implement mechanisms for the effective involvement of persons with disabilities, in particular of persons with intellectual disabilities, through their representative organizations, in public decision-making processes, concerning laws and policies affecting them, and strengthen the National Committee for Persons with Disabilities;**

(e) **Recognize the role of civil society organizations as human rights defenders, prohibit any reprisals against individuals and organizations promoting the rights of persons with disabilities and take measures to protect the civic space.**

## **B. Specific rights (arts. 5–30)**

### **Equality and non-discrimination (art. 5)**

8. The Committee notes with concern that:

(a) Legislation does not explicitly prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability (including against persons affected by leprosy), in all areas of life, including health and education;

(b) The definition of discrimination does not include multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination;

(c) The denial of reasonable accommodation is not recognized as a form of discrimination on the ground of disability;

(d) There is a lack of effective redress in cases of discrimination on the basis of disability and multiple and intersectional discrimination.

9. **The Committee, in line with its general comment No. 6 (2018) on equality and non-discrimination, recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Review legislation to explicitly prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability (including against persons affected by leprosy), including Law No. 73 on hygiene, disease prevention and health promotion, Law No. 62 on education and Law No. 77 on gender equality;**

(b) **Prohibit multiple and intersectional discrimination on the grounds of disability and its intersection with other grounds, such as age, sex, race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation and any other status, and adopt strategies to eliminate multiple and intersectional discrimination;**

(c) **Recognize within anti-discrimination law the denial of reasonable accommodation as a form of discrimination within all areas of life;**

(d) **Ensure access by persons with disabilities to effective legal remedies and redress, including compensation in cases of disability-based discrimination and the denial of reasonable accommodation.**

### **Women with disabilities (art. 6)**

10. The Committee is concerned about:

(a) The lack of protection in legislation from intersectional discrimination faced by women and girls with disabilities, in particular under Law No. 8 on the development and protection of women and Law No. 77 on gender equality, and the absence of a two-pronged approach to gender mainstreaming;

(b) Multiple and intersectional discrimination and stigmatization against women and girls with disabilities, especially those belonging to ethnic and religious groups, women victims of unexploded ordnance and women affected by leprosy;

(c) Insufficient empowerment and involvement of women and girls with disabilities and their representative organizations in consultations related to legislation and policies on gender equality.

**11. The Committee recommends that the State party take note of the Committee's general comment No. 3 (2016) on women and girls with disabilities in its implementation of efforts aimed at the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 5. In particular, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

**(a) Adopt effective and specific measures to mainstream the human rights model to disability into its gender equality policies, and mainstream a gender perspective into its disability-related legislation and policies;**

**(b) Implement measures to prevent multiple and intersectional discrimination against women and girls with disabilities, in particular those belonging to ethnic and religious groups, women victims of unexploded ordnance and women affected by leprosy, in all aspects of life, in both urban and rural areas;**

**(c) Take steps to empower women and girls with disabilities and support their representative organizations, including the Women with Disabilities Association, and ensure their effective participation in the design and implementation of legislation and policies on gender equality.**

#### **Children with disabilities (art. 7)**

12. The Committee observes with concern:

(a) The multiple and intersectional discrimination against children with disabilities, particularly those affected by unexploded ordnance, children belonging to ethnic groups, children with intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities and autistic children;

(b) The lack of support of children with disabilities in education and in terms of access to social services in the community, and their institutionalization in medical-social establishments;

(c) The absence of mechanisms to consult with children with disabilities and to enable them to express their views in all matters concerning them.

**13. With reference to the joint statement of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on the rights of children with disabilities, issued in 2022, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

**(a) Ensure that law and policy on children's rights are inclusive of and protect all children with disabilities from all forms of discrimination, including those affected by unexploded ordnance, children belonging to ethnic groups, children with intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities and autistic children;**

**(b) Ensure that all children with disabilities, including those in rural and remote areas, receive effective and appropriate protection, care and support, and are included in the community;**

**(c) Establish a mechanism that respects the evolving capacities of children with disabilities to ensure that they can form their views and express them freely in all matters affecting them, and that these views are given due weight in accordance with the child's age and maturity.**

#### **Awareness-raising (art. 8)**

14. The Committee is concerned about:

(a) Discriminatory attitudes, stereotypes and prejudices towards persons with disabilities, including persons affected by leprosy, and negative media portrayal of persons with disabilities;

(b) Insufficient measures aimed at increasing awareness among the population about the rights of persons with disabilities and at increasing the ability of such persons to advocate for their own rights, and the lack of evaluation of these efforts;

(c) The lack of information made available on the Convention, particularly in rural areas;

(d) The lack of awareness among policymakers, judges, prosecutors, teachers, and medical, health and other professionals working with persons with disabilities about the rights recognized in the Convention.

**15. The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Adopt a national strategy, in close consultation with and with the active involvement of organizations of persons with disabilities, in urban and rural areas, to raise awareness, combat prejudices against persons with disabilities, and ensure that the media portray persons with disabilities in a positive manner in line with the Convention;**

(b) **Reinforce actions aimed at empowering persons with disabilities, including persons affected by leprosy, and periodically evaluate the impact of awareness-raising initiatives;**

(c) **Make the Convention available in the Lao People's Democratic Republic in accessible formats, including Easy Read, Braille and Lao Sign Language;**

(d) **With the close consultation and active involvement of organizations of persons with disabilities, reinforce capacity-building programmes on the Convention for public policymakers, judges, teachers, social workers, health and other professionals working with persons with disabilities.**

**Accessibility (art. 9)**

16. The Committee notes with concern that:

(a) Persons with disabilities face barriers to access to the physical environment, transportation, information and communications, including information and communications technology, and other facilities and services open or provided to the public, in particular in rural areas;

(b) The relevant legislation does not include clear accessibility standards, reference to universal design and sanctions for non-compliance;

(c) Lao Sign Language is yet to be officially recognized, which limits social interactions for persons who are deaf.

**17. Recalling its general comment No. 2 (2014) on accessibility and Sustainable Development Goal 11, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Adopt and implement an action plan and strategy to identify existing barriers to accessibility and provide the human, technical and financial resources necessary to remove those barriers to ensure the accessibility of, inter alia, buildings, transportation, information and communication, including information and communications technologies, and other facilities and services open or provided to the public, in both urban and rural areas;**

(b) **Revise relevant legislation, in particular Law No. 5 on construction, Law No. 24 on land transportation and Law No. 1 on media, to establish and mainstream accessibility standards and universal design, a system of sanctions for non-compliance, and complaint mechanisms for persons with disabilities;**

(c) **Officially recognize Lao Sign Language and develop training programmes and employment incentives to strengthen interpreter and trainer capacity.**

**Situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies (art. 11)**

18. The Committee is concerned about the:

(a) Absence of reference to the specific requirements of persons with disabilities in legislation and policies, including Law No. 71 on disaster management and the national emergency preparedness and response plan;

(b) Lack of specific protocols for the evacuation of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, humanitarian emergencies and natural disasters, and barriers to guarantee reasonable accommodation and accessibility to information, evacuation centres, emergency relief assistance, early warning systems and community needs assessments;

(c) Lack of consultation of organizations of persons with disabilities in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating disaster risk reduction and climate change strategies;

(d) The disproportionate effect of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on persons with disabilities, in particular persons who are in institutions, and about the barriers faced by persons with disabilities in gaining access to emergency information and health-care services.

**19. Recalling the guidance issued by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on COVID-19 and the rights of persons with disabilities, the Secretary-General's policy brief on a disability-inclusive response to COVID-19, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, and the Paris Agreement on climate change, and with the active participation of representative organizations of persons with disabilities, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Ensure that national legislation, policies and programmes that address situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies are disability-inclusive, and take into account the requirements of persons with disabilities, including those belonging to ethnic and religious groups and victims of unexploded ordnance;**

(b) **Develop protocols for evacuation in situations of risk, humanitarian emergencies and natural disasters, providing clarity of the specific requirements of persons with disabilities, and ensure that reasonable accommodation and accessibility to information, evacuation centres, emergency relief assistance, early warning systems, community needs assessments and assistive devices are made accessible to persons with disabilities in urban and rural areas;**

(c) **Ensure the effective involvement of organizations of persons with disabilities with a gender-balanced participation in the design and implementation of legislation and policies relating to climate change and disaster risk reduction and management, including the National Disaster Prevention and Control Committee;**

(d) **Mainstream disability in its COVID-19 response and recovery plans, including in respect of ensuring equal access to vaccines, and other economic and social programmes to tackle the negative impact of the pandemic.**

**Equal recognition before the law (art. 12)**

20. The Committee observes with concern that:

(a) Provisions in legislation, including the Civil Code, the Penal Code, the Law on Civil Procedure and the Law on Criminal Procedure, deny the right of persons with disabilities to equal recognition before the law, particularly persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities, on the basis of actual or perceived impairment;

(b) There is a perpetuation of substituted decision-making and a failure to recognize the will and preferences of persons with disabilities.

**21. Recalling its general comment No. 1 (2014) on equal recognition before the law, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Amend the Civil Code, the Penal Code, the Law on Civil Procedure and the Law on Criminal Procedure, and repeal any laws and associated policies and practices that have the purpose or effect of denying or diminishing the recognition of any person with disabilities as a person before the law;**

(b) **Develop and implement, in close consultation with and with the active involvement of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations,**

**supported decision-making mechanisms that respect the will, preferences and individual choices of persons with disabilities.**

**Access to justice (art. 13)**

22. The Committee is concerned about:

(a) The lack of access to justice by persons with disabilities, in particular persons with psychosocial or intellectual disabilities and persons who are deaf, deafblind or hard of hearing, as a result of the absence of procedural and age-appropriate accommodations, and the lack of access to physical facilities, information and communication procedures used in the administration of justice;

(b) Inaccessible legal clinics and dissemination platforms, such as the “LaoLaw” mobile phone application, as well as the lack of mainstreaming disability within the village mediation unit services and the lack of free legal aid in accessible formats, in particular for persons who are blind and deaf;

(c) The insufficient understanding of persons with disabilities of legal proceedings, and limited awareness among the judiciary and law enforcement officials about the rights of persons with disabilities.

23. **The Committee recalls the International Principles and Guidelines on Access to Justice for Persons with Disabilities, prepared in 2020 by the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, and target 16.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals, and recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Adopt measures to provide legal assistance and gender- and age-appropriate procedural accommodation for persons with disabilities to enable their participation in all legal procedures on an equal basis with others, including by facilitating the use of the communication method of their choice in judicial interactions, such as sign language, Braille, Easy Read, captioning, augmentative and alternative communication devices, and all other accessible means, modes and formats of communication;**

(b) **Ensure disability inclusion in justice services, in particular village mediation units, legal aid offices and courts, and guarantee the accessibility of dissemination platforms such as the “LaoLaw” mobile phone application;**

(c) **Ensure regular training programmes for lawyers, court staff, judges, prosecutors and law enforcement officers, including police and prison officers, on the rights of persons with disabilities, and awareness-raising efforts for all persons with disabilities.**

**Liberty and security of person (art. 14)**

24. The Committee is concerned about:

(a) The absence of statistical data on the number of persons with disabilities deprived of their liberty and placed in institutional settings;

(b) The information provided by the State party for the Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty, indicating that in 2018, there were 1,010 children with disabilities living in specialized institutions across the country;

(c) Reports of confinement at home of persons with disabilities, in particular persons with intensive support requirements.

25. **The Committee recommends that the State party take note of the Committee’s guidelines on the right to liberty and security of persons with disabilities<sup>5</sup> and that it:**

<sup>5</sup> See [A/72/55](#), annex I.

(a) **Collect data of persons with disabilities deprived of liberty and placed in institutional settings, disaggregated by age, gender and type of disability, on an annual basis;**

(b) **Repeal all legislation and practices that allow for the deprivation of liberty of adults and children with disabilities on the basis of actual or perceived impairment or that authorizes institutionalization or involuntary hospitalization of persons with disabilities;**

(c) **Prevent the confinement of persons with disabilities within their homes and provide for human rights-based support and community services for all persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others.**

**Freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (art. 15)**

26. The Committee is concerned that legislation, including Law No. 57 on persons with disabilities, lacks special provisions and measures to guarantee persons with disabilities freedom from torture and inhuman treatment and to combat harmful practices against them.

27. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Adopt legal provisions and concrete administrative measures to protect persons with disabilities from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, including protocols to ensure free consent concerning medical treatment;**

(b) **Ensure that the complaint procedure is accessible to all persons with disabilities, and investigate and sanction perpetrators of practices that may amount to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment against persons with disabilities, such as restraints, isolation, forced medication and sterilization, and electroconvulsive therapy.**

**Freedom from exploitation, violence and abuse (art. 16)**

28. The Committee notes with concern:

(a) The lack of provisions on disability-sensitive referral systems, recovery services and facilities, reintegration, accessible information, and education on exploitation, violence and abuse under Law No. 56 on preventing and combating violence against women and children;

(b) The absence of a comprehensive strategy against all forms of exploitation, violence and abuse against persons with disabilities in all settings, including in the family, at school and in the workplace;

(c) The lack of information and statistical data regarding violence against women and girls with disabilities and related complaints submitted by them;

(d) The insufficient resources of the Centre for Counselling and Protection of Women and Children, as well as the lack of accessible shelters for women and girls who are victims of violence, and the lack of effective remedies and redress for persons with disabilities facing violence;

(e) Inadequate training of the staff, carers and families of persons with disabilities, health personnel and law enforcement officials to recognize all forms of exploitation, violence and abuse.

29. **In line with its statement issued on 24 November 2021 calling for action to be taken immediately to eliminate gender-based violence against women and girls with disabilities, and with targets 5.1, 5.2 and 5.5 of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Ensure that legislation and policies to prevent and combat all forms of violence include persons with disabilities, including the Law No. 56 on preventing and combating violence against women and children;**



(b) **Adopt a comprehensive strategy to prevent exploitation, violence and abuse targeting persons with disabilities, especially women and girls with psychosocial and/or intellectual disabilities, women and girls belonging to ethnic and religious groups, persons affected by leprosy and victims of unexploded ordnance, and ensure that persons with disabilities have information about how to avoid, recognize and report cases and that victims of exploitation, violence or abuse have access to independent complaint mechanisms and appropriate remedies;**

(c) **Collect data on violence against persons with disabilities, identifying gender-based violence against women and girls with disabilities, in the private and public spheres, and ensure budget allocations and access to support services for women and girls with disabilities who are victims of gender-based violence;**

(d) **Ensure that shelters for victims of violence are accessible to persons with disabilities and provide the necessary resources to the Centre for Counselling and Protection of Women and Children;**

(e) **Provide continuous training for the families of persons with disabilities and for their caregivers, health professionals and law enforcement officers to enable them to recognize all forms of exploitation, violence and abuse, and to better communicate and work with persons with disabilities who are victims of violence.**

#### **Protecting the integrity of the person (art. 17)**

30. The Committee is concerned about the lack of information on concrete measures taken to protect persons with disabilities, especially persons with intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities, against forced medical procedures and interventions, including sterilization.

31. **The Committee recommends that the State party strengthen the legal and policy frameworks to ensure that all medical and psychiatric treatment and interventions are done on the basis of the individual's free and informed consent. It also recommends that the State party take all measures necessary to eliminate the forced sterilization of persons with disabilities, especially persons with psychosocial and/or intellectual disabilities, and those still deprived of their legal capacity.**

#### **Liberty of movement and nationality (art. 18)**

32. The Committee notes with concern the barriers in gaining access to administrative facilities and proceedings for birth registration and civil documentation, including the inaccessibility of buildings, and communication barriers for persons with disabilities, in particular those from ethnic groups and those living in remote and rural areas.

33. **The Committee recommends that the State party take effective measures to remove all barriers for persons with disabilities, including those from ethnic groups and those living in remote and rural areas, to the enjoyment of their rights to a nationality, birth registration and civil documentation, to enable them to exercise all the rights enshrined in the Convention.**

#### **Living independently and being included in the community (art. 19)**

34. The Committee observes with concern:

(a) The segregation or exclusion of persons with disabilities from the community into particular living arrangements, including owing to stigmatization and attitudinal barriers, in particular against persons affected by leprosy, children with disabilities, and persons with intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities;

(b) The lack of information about community support services, support of independent living and inclusion in the community, including personal assistance, especially in remote and rural areas;

(c) The lack of disaggregated data on the number of persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities and persons affected by leprosy living in institutions, special villages, rehabilitation centres other than community-based, group homes, or other settings with defining elements of an institution.

35. **With reference to its general comment No. 5 (2017), and the guidelines on deinstitutionalization, including in emergencies, issued by the Committee in 2022, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Promote the rights of persons with disabilities, in particular persons affected by leprosy, children with disabilities and persons with intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities, to live independently and be included in the community, including by raising awareness among the general public to tackle stigmatization and attitudinal barriers;**

(b) **Ensure that support services in the community, such as personal assistance, are available, accessible, affordable and of quality across the State party, including in remote and rural areas, and enable persons with disabilities to exercise choice and control over their lives and to make decisions concerning where and with whom to live;**

(c) **Collect disaggregated data on the number of persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities and persons affected by leprosy, still living in institutions, special villages or other settings with defining elements of an institution.**

#### **Personal mobility (art. 20)**

36. The Committee is concerned about:

(a) Barriers faced by persons with disabilities in acquiring and maintaining the mobility aids and assistive devices, technologies and services necessary for their personal mobility, in particular in rural and remote areas;

(b) The “good health” certificate as a requirement for driver licence applications, which exclude persons with disabilities;

(c) Limited trained personnel to impart mobility skills to persons with disabilities;

(d) Insufficient financial support for the Centre of Medical Rehabilitation, the Orthopaedic and Rehabilitation Factory 686 and the provincial rehabilitation centres to produce and provide assistive devices.

37. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Ensure that persons with disabilities can acquire quality and affordable or cost-free mobility aids and assistive devices, technologies and services necessary for their personal mobility, as well as appropriate information on how to use and maintain them;**

(b) **Remove discriminatory requirements in driving licence applications that exclude persons with disabilities;**

(c) **Guarantee training for orientation and mobility practitioners and teachers in the use of mobility aids and assistive devices and technologies for persons with physical disabilities and persons who are blind or partially sighted;**

(d) **Increase budget allocations for the Centre of Medical Rehabilitation, the Orthopaedic and Rehabilitation Factory 686 and the provincial rehabilitation centres to meet the demand for the assistive devices.**

#### **Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information (art. 21)**

38. The Committee notes with concern:

(a) The insufficient provision of information in accessible formats and of communications technology, in both public and private media outlets, and the absence of accessible websites that provide public information;

(b) The lack of recognition of Lao Sign Language as an official language;

(c) The lack of professionals trained in the use of sign language and tactile, Braille and Easy Read formats, particularly for persons who are deaf, deafblind, blind or visually impaired, persons with intellectual disabilities and autistic persons;

(d) The cancellation of the radio programme “Friends of the Disabled”, dedicated to disseminating essential information to and about persons with disabilities, due to insufficient funding in 2010.

39. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Ensure that information provided to the general public is available to persons with disabilities in accessible formats, such as Braille, sign language, Easy Read, plain language, captioning, audio-description and tactile, augmentative and alternative means of communication, and ensure that websites are accessible and comply with the standards developed by the Web Accessibility Initiative of the World Wide Web Consortium;**

(b) **Recognize Lao Sign Language as an official language, promote access to and the use of sign language in all areas of life, and ensure the availability of qualified sign language interpreters;**

(c) **Guarantee a pool of qualified relevant professionals trained in the use of tactile, Braille and Easy Read formats, in consultation with organizations of persons with disabilities;**

(d) **Re-establish the “Friends of the Disabled” radio programme, and consider integrating broadcasting and community engagement across social media platforms, and similar initiatives led by persons with disabilities.**

**Respect for privacy (art. 22)**

40. The Committee is concerned about the lack of information in the State party on progress made as regards the protection of the right to privacy of persons with disabilities.

41. **The Committee recommends that the State party ensure the privacy of persons with disabilities, in particular persons with intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities, including the confidentiality of information and of their personal medical records, in institutions and mental health systems and services.**

**Respect for home and the family (art. 23)**

42. The Committee observes with concern:

(a) The limited support available for the parents and families of children with disabilities and for parents with disabilities to ensure their right to a family life and prevent involuntary family separation on the basis of disability;

(b) The lack of information on whether the rights of persons with disabilities, including persons with intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities, to enter into marriage, exercise parental responsibilities and adopt children are ensured on an equal basis with others;

(c) The fact that many ethnic groups consider marriage between the perpetrator of a rape and the victim as the only remedy for restoring harmony.

43. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Support children with disabilities and their families and prevent separation of children from their families on the basis of disability of either the child or one or both of their parents, including for those in rural areas;**

(b) **Ensure that all persons with disabilities, including persons with intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities, may enter into marriage, exercise parental responsibilities and adopt children on an equal basis with others;**

(c) **Adopt measures to eradicate patriarchal attitudes and deep-rooted stereotypes that justify marriage between the perpetrator of a rape and the victim, especially in rural and remote areas in the northern part of the country and within some ethnic groups.**

**Education (art. 24)**

44. The Committee is concerned about:

(a) The limited progress made towards achieving inclusive education; insufficient implementation of the national action plan on inclusive education due to limited resources, lack of technical assistance and lack of subsidies for persons with disabilities; and the existence of two special schools for the deaf and blind in Vientiane and Luang Prabang Province, under the Ministry of Health;

(b) The high illiteracy rate among persons with disabilities and the high number of students with disabilities that drop out of school due to difficulties in reaching school, owing to the distance of the school from their homes or limited public transportation, and the lack of reasonable accommodation for students in the mainstream education system;

(c) Insufficient training for teachers and non-teaching staff on the right to inclusive education, in particular in rural settings, and negative attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities into mainstream education among teachers, school administrative staff, students without disabilities and their parents;

(d) Limited accessible materials, adaptive learning environments and individualized accommodation for students with disabilities at all levels, especially those residing in remote areas and those belonging to ethnic groups;

(e) The rejection from school of students with disabilities, in particular students with intellectual disabilities and autism, girls with disabilities and those affected by leprosy;

(f) The limited availability of higher education opportunities for persons with disabilities, given that many university programmes do not give admission to students with disabilities;

(g) Data collection focused only on children with physical disabilities.

45. **Recalling its general comment No. 4 (2016) on the right to inclusive education, and targets 4.5 and 4.a of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Adopt the necessary measures to implement the national action plan on inclusive education, involving all line ministries and stakeholders, with sufficient budgetary allocations, to ensure that all students with disabilities have access to quality inclusive education in the mainstream education system at all levels;**

(b) **Redouble its efforts to reduce illiteracy and the drop-out rate from schools among persons with disabilities, including by ensuring the availability of schools close to the communities and accessible public transportation, and by establishing a centralized mechanism to request reasonable accommodation in the educational system;**

(c) **Ensure continuous training for teachers and non-teaching staff on inclusive education at all levels, including training in sign language and other accessible formats for information and communication, as well as undertake raise awareness on the importance of inclusive education at all levels, among the community;**

(d) **Provide students with disabilities with individualized accommodation, including classroom support and accessible learning environments, teaching methods and learning materials in alternative and accessible formats, such as inclusive digital access, and modes and means of communication including Easy Read, communication aids, and assistive and information technology, and make sure that there are enough teachers fluent in Lao Sign Language, especially in rural and remote areas;**

(e) **Take measures to prevent the rejection and stigmatization of children with disabilities and ensure that all students with disabilities, in particular students with intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities, girls with disabilities, autistic students and those affected by leprosy, receive an education in mainstream school settings;**

(f) **Ensure the accessibility of tertiary and vocational inclusive education, through measures of universal design and reasonable accommodation;**

(g) **Systematically collect and disaggregate data on all students, in and out of school, and school drop-outs, by gender, age and disability.**

#### **Health (art. 25)**

46. The Committee notes with concern:

(a) That the national health insurance strategy for the period 2017–2020 does not include persons with disabilities in the priority groups, and also notes with concern the barriers faced by persons with disabilities in accessing health-care services at all levels, especially in rural areas, including physical, communication and financial barriers, and obstacles resulting from a lack of accessible and affordable public transportation;

(b) That the majority of health-care services available to persons with disabilities is focused on physical disabilities and continues to cater to persons affected by unexploded ordnance accidents, with a strong emphasis on rehabilitation and assistive products;

(c) The gaps in the provision of health-care services, given that substantial health facilities with more quality services are located in Vientiane, and the limited availability of primary health-care services for blind or deaf persons, persons with intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities and autism;

(d) The lack of access to sexual and reproductive health-care services for persons with disabilities, in particular all women and girls with disabilities, including women and girls with intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities;

(e) The lack of availability and accessibility of human rights-based mental health services;

(f) The insufficient training of health-care personnel on the rights of persons with disabilities, and the lack of information about protocols for persons with disabilities to exercise and express their free and informed consent with respect to medical treatment;

(g) The lack of systematization of official statistics on persons with disabilities accessing public health-care services.

47. **Taking into account the links between article 25 of the Convention and targets 3.7 and 3.8 of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Adopt and implement a strategy, with sufficient human, technical and financial resources, to remove the physical, communication and financial barriers faced by persons with disabilities in accessing health-care services, and guarantee their access to disability- and gender-sensitive health-care services and information, especially in rural areas, and include persons with disabilities as a priority group under the national health insurance strategy for the period 2017–2020;**

(b) **Ensure quality and inclusive health-care services in the entire State party, including in rural and remote areas, and for all the diversity of persons with disabilities, including blind or deaf persons, persons with intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities and autistic persons;**

(c) **Provide persons with disabilities, in particular women and girls with disabilities, with access to sexual and reproductive health care and services, and ensure supported decision-making for women with intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities so that they can reaffirm their sexual and reproductive autonomy and self-determination;**

(d) **Develop community and human rights-based mental health services and support across the State party;**

(e) **Provide systematic training to medical personnel on the rights of persons with disabilities, including the human rights model of disability, accessible formats and alternative communication methods, and improve health-care service information packages, and community engagement with persons with disabilities and their families;**

(f) **Systematically collect and disaggregate data on persons accessing the public health services, by gender, age and disability.**

#### **Habilitation and rehabilitation (art. 26)**

48. The Committee observes with concern:

(a) The insufficient availability of comprehensive and community-based habilitation and rehabilitation programmes for persons with disabilities, including those affected by leprosy, and victims of unexploded ordnance, in particular in rural and remote areas, as well as the overemphasis of health-related issues as regards policies on habilitation and rehabilitation;

(b) The limited progress made in implementing the national medical rehabilitation strategic plan for the period 2018–2025, in particular in the northern provinces, and the lack of the related action plan;

(c) The lack of district-level and community-based rehabilitation services, the low level of awareness of and access to assistive products and rehabilitation services among persons with disabilities, and the lack of affordable costs of transportation to get to rehabilitation centres;

(d) The limited specialized services available at the rehabilitation services to meet the needs of persons with intellectual disabilities, autism and psychosocial disabilities, and persons who require more intensive support, as well as insufficient training to professionals working in rehabilitation centres.

49. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Reinforce efforts to ensure comprehensive habilitation and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, in particular in rural areas, taking into account the human rights model of disability, such as community-based inclusive development programmes;**

(b) **Allocate the resources necessary to implement the national medical rehabilitation strategic plan for the period 2018–2025, in particular in the northern provinces, and adopt the related action plan;**

(c) **Expand habilitation and rehabilitation systems to ensure that all persons with disabilities, including persons with intellectual disabilities and autism, persons with psychosocial disabilities, children with disabilities and persons who require more intensive support in rural areas, have access to habilitation and rehabilitation on the basis of their individual requirements, and expand the coverage of rehabilitation services with affordable transportation costs;**

(d) **Enhance awareness-raising activities to disseminate information in accessible formats on the importance and availability of rehabilitation services, and strengthen the training of professionals working in rehabilitation centres.**

#### **Work and employment (art. 27)**

50. The Committee is concerned about:

(a) The high rate of unemployment, part-time employment in precarious conditions and low-wage employment among persons with disabilities, in particular for persons with intellectual disabilities, persons with psychosocial disabilities, women with disabilities, persons affected by leprosy and persons with disabilities living in rural areas;

(b) The attitudinal barriers deterring employers from hiring persons with disabilities, and the physical barriers in the work environment, in particular the reported lack of reasonable accommodation, accessible transportation and accessible information, including for jobseekers;

(c) The insufficient and segregated access to quality professional training and vocational programmes;

(d) The lack of official data or statistics on persons with disabilities employed in the public and private sectors.

**51. The Committee recommends that, in line with target 8.5 of the Sustainable Development Goals, the State party:**

(a) **Take effective measures to increase employment of persons with disabilities, in particular persons with intellectual disabilities, persons with psychosocial disabilities, women with disabilities, persons affected by leprosy and persons with disabilities living in rural areas and in public and private sectors;**

(b) **Consider implementing an affirmative action programme to ensure job placement and job retention for persons with disabilities in the public and private sectors;**

(c) **Guarantee non-discrimination in employment, including by the provision of reasonable accommodation when required and by raising awareness among employers, and ensure that the open labour market is inclusive and accessible and that there are decent labour conditions for all persons with disabilities, including equal pay for work of equal value;**

(d) **Ensure access to inclusive and quality professional training and vocational programmes;**

(e) **Collect disaggregated data on the employment of persons with disabilities in the public, private and informal sectors.**

**Adequate standard of living and social protection (art. 28)**

52. The Committee notes with concern:

(a) The limited access to social protection schemes and support for persons with disabilities, including victims of unexploded ordnance, persons with disabilities belonging to ethnic groups, persons affected by leprosy and persons with disabilities living in rural and remote areas;

(b) The fact that the disability assessment and certification procedures are not in line with the Convention, which leads to some persons with disabilities being excluded from social protection schemes, and that the majority of the Lao workforce comprises self-employed, homemakers and informal workers, which do not benefit from social protection;

(c) The high rate of poverty among persons with disabilities, including owing to disability-related expenses, and barriers to gaining access to services such as accessible public housing and transportation;

(d) The higher disability prevalence in the poorest areas in rural areas and in impoverished ethnic groups, such as Mon-Khmer, the failure to include disability as a key intersectional component in the State party poverty analysis, and the disparity in the administration of social security and social welfare provisions in rural and remote areas.

**53. Taking into account the links between article 28 of the Convention and target 1.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Mainstream the rights of persons with disabilities into the national social protection strategy, the ninth national socioeconomic development plan, for the period 2021–2025, and the national plan for poverty reduction, and ensure access to social protection and support for all persons with disabilities, including victims of unexploded ordnance, persons with disabilities belonging to ethnic groups, persons affected by leprosy and persons with disabilities living in rural and remote areas;**

(b) **Adopt legislative and policy measures to ensure that any assessment procedures are in line with the Convention and do not lead to discriminatory treatment in gaining access to social protection schemes, and include entitlements of social protection for self-employed and informal workers;**

(c) **Establish social protection and poverty reduction schemes with adequate budgetary allocations to guarantee an adequate standard of living for persons with disabilities, and provide them with allowances to meet disability-related expenses;**

(d) **Increase stipends and social welfare assistance to persons with disabilities, in particular those in the poorest areas, in rural areas and in impoverished ethnic groups, and improve information packages about social protection services in plain language and accessible formats.**

#### **Participation in political and public life (art. 29)**

54. The Committee observes with concern:

(a) That persons with disabilities who are deemed “crazy persons” or “persons who lost their mind” are excluded from exercising their right to vote and stand for elections under the Constitution, the Civil Code and Law No. 105 on elections;

(b) The lack of accessibility of voting procedures, facilities and materials;

(c) The low level of participation of persons with disabilities in political and public life, the limited representation of organizations of persons with disabilities at the provincial level and the limited participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in decision-making processes.

55. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Amend constitutional and legislative provisions restricting the rights of persons with disabilities to vote and to stand in elections and hold public office;**

(b) **Guarantee the accessibility of electoral processes, facilities and materials, in consultation with organizations of persons with disabilities;**

(c) **Ensure that persons with disabilities can effectively participate in political, public life and decision-making processes at all levels, including through their representative organizations, and strengthen organizational and technical capacities of these organizations.**

#### **Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport (art. 30)**

56. The Committee notes:

(a) That the State party has not ratified the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired or Otherwise Print Disabled;

(b) With concern the low participation of persons with disabilities, including women and children with disabilities belonging to ethnic groups, in cultural life and in recreational and sports activities.

57. **The Committee recommends that the State party:**

(a) **Take all appropriate measures to ratify the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired, or Otherwise Print Disabled;**

(b) **Eliminate social and environmental barriers hindering the participation of persons with disabilities, in particular women and children with disabilities belonging to ethnic groups, in cultural life and in recreational and sports activities, and encourage their participation on an equal basis with others.**

### **C. Specific obligations (arts. 31–33)**

#### **Statistics and data collection (art. 31)**

58. The Committee is concerned about:



(a) The absence of the systematic disaggregated collection of quality and reliable data on the situation of persons with disabilities in all areas of life, mainly due to the lack of disability-related questions in the national census;

(b) Limitations in the design, data collection and quality control of the fourth National Population and Housing Census in 2015, which reported a disability prevalence of 2.77 per cent of the overall population;

(c) The lack of an accessible and consistent database on the situation of persons with disabilities and barriers to issuing disability identification cards.

**59. Recalling Sustainable Development Goal 17, in particular target 17.18, and the Washington Group short set of questions on disability, the Committee recommends that the State party:**

**(a) Collect, analyse and disseminate quality, timely and reliable data, disaggregated by disability, sex, age, ethnicity, religion, geographical location and socioeconomic status, on the fulfilment of the rights of persons with disabilities in all areas covered by the Convention, in collaboration with representative organizations of persons with disabilities;**

**(b) Improve the use of the Washington Group short set of questions on disability when collecting information about the situation of persons with disabilities, by taking into consideration the local context, training for the interpretation of data and the barriers to the exercise of the rights of persons with disabilities, including the next National Population and Housing Census;**

**(c) Introduce the Disability Management Information System to consolidate the various sector-specific disability records, make it accessible, support the rollout of a nationwide disability identification process and increase efforts to issue disability ID cards for all persons with disabilities.**

#### **International cooperation (art. 32)**

60. The Committee notes with concern:

(a) The absence of information on the measures taken to mainstream disability rights in the national implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

(b) That the State party does not sufficiently consult with and involve representative organizations of persons with disabilities in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of international cooperation activities.

**61. The Committee recommends that the State party:**

**(a) Ensure that policies and programmes for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are disability-inclusive;**

**(b) Guarantee the close consultation and active involvement of persons with disabilities, through their representative organizations, in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of international cooperation programmes, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the implementation of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013-2022, and the Incheon Strategy to “Make the Right Real” for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific.**

#### **National implementation and monitoring (art. 33)**

62. The Committee observes with concern:

(a) The absence of an independent framework for protecting, promoting and monitoring the implementation of the Convention, and of a national human rights institution in line with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles);

(b) The potential overlap between the National Committee for Persons with Disabilities under the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, and the National Committee

on Human Rights under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, concerning the implementation and monitoring of the Convention;

(c) The limited participation of all persons with disabilities, through their representative organizations, in the implementation and monitoring of the Convention.

**63. The Committee recommends that the State party take into account its guidelines on independent monitoring frameworks and their participation in the work of the Committee<sup>6</sup> and that it:**

(a) **Establish a national human rights institution with a broad mandate in full compliance with the Paris Principles, including its full independence and by providing it with an explicit mandate and sufficient human, technical and financial resources to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities;**

(b) **Clarify the distribution of duties on implementation, monitoring and reporting on the Convention between the National Committee for Persons with Disabilities and the National Committee on Human Rights;**

(c) **Strengthen the close consultation and active involvement of persons with disabilities through their representative organizations, including those that represent women and children, persons with intellectual and/or psychosocial disabilities and persons with disabilities in rural areas, in the implementation and monitoring processes of the Convention.**

## **IV. Follow-up**

### **Dissemination of information**

64. The Committee emphasizes the importance of all the recommendations contained in the present concluding observations. With regard to urgent measures that must be taken, the Committee would like to draw the State party's attention to the recommendations contained in paragraphs 7 and 63, on participation of persons with disabilities through their representative organizations in the implementation and monitoring of the Convention, and paragraph 45, on inclusive education.

65. The Committee requests the State party to implement the recommendations contained in the present concluding observations. It recommends that the State party transmit the concluding observations for consideration and action to members of the Government and National Assembly, officials in relevant ministries, local authorities and members of relevant professional groups, such as education, medical and legal professionals, as well as to the media, using modern social communication strategies.

66. The Committee strongly encourages the State party to involve civil society organizations, in particular organizations of persons with disabilities, in the preparation of its periodic report.

67. The Committee requests the State party to disseminate the present concluding observations widely, including to non-governmental organizations and organizations of persons with disabilities, and to persons with disabilities themselves and members of their families, in national and ethnic languages, including sign language, and in accessible formats, including Easy Read, and to make them available on the government website on human rights.

### **Next periodic report**

68. The Committee requests the State party to submit its combined second, third, fourth and fifth periodic reports by 25 October 2027 and to include in them information on the implementation of the recommendations made in the present concluding observations. The Committee also requests the State party to consider submitting the above-mentioned reports under the Committee's simplified reporting procedure,

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<sup>6</sup> CRPD/C/1/Rev.1, annex.

**according to which the Committee prepares a list of issues at least one year prior to the due date set for the report of a State party. The replies of a State party to such a list of issues constitute its report.**

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