**OSCE, ODIHR and the OSCE Programme Office in Nur Sultan.**

**2 December 2021**

***Launch of Russian Easy-to-Read version of the UN CRPD***

Remarks of Gerard Quinn

UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/disability/srdisabilities/pages/srdisabilitiesindex.aspx>

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Thank you so much for the invitation to address you today.

I am a long term admirer of the work of the OSCE and ODIHR – both in Warsaw and Vienna, and especially in-country.

Your work on disability rights fits entirely with your overall mission to advance peace and security based on the rule of law and inclusion.

I note the involvement today of the Human Rights Commission of Kazakhstan. I used to sit on the Human Rights Commission in my country (Ireland) and know at first-hand how important your work is in giving reality to international treaties at the national level. I salute your commitment to disability rights.

And I note especially the presence of so many persons and representative organisations of persons with disabilities. This is all about you.

In the time available I would like to do three things:

**First of all, I’d like to place your amazing work in a broader context**.

Often, we think of ourselves as working in complete isolation.

Actually, what you are doing in Kazakhstan and in the broader region, mirrors what many others are doing in all corners of the world.

It is important that you can see these links – and value your own efforts - all the more so because it can inspire others.

**Secondly, I want to focus on your work and why, for me, it is critically important.**

At one level it is a work of literal translation.

But I like to think of it as translation at a much deeper level – translating majestic generalities in the UN CRPD into language that fits within your own culture as well as your own economic and social circumstances.

You are best placed to do this. That is translation at its very best.

**Last, allow me to look ahead.** The steps you take today are the beginning of a process.

Change is always complicated especially when we are disturbing decades if not centuries of established practice.

Translating the core values and ideas of the treaty is a start – an excellent start.

Getting traction for them to inform change is much harder – but not impossible.

Let me say a few words about the dynamics of change and what lies ahead for you and to encourage you.

**First of all, your work in a broader context.**

I like to remind people that the UN CRPD was a surprise.

It was a surprise in the sense, that few thought it was possible to draft such a treaty within 4 years or at all. Really, the push came from you – from organisations of persons with disabilities – in the international system. The moral strength of your collective voice at global level was key. And your voice closer to home is now key.

The other surprise was that the treaty did not just focus on equality in a narrow, technical or legal sense.

In fact, the centre of gravity of the treaty is personhood – your own ‘*moral agency.’*

This is what people mean by the shift from ‘object’ to ‘subject.’ This is a big takeaway from the treaty – re-centring people in their own lives – undoing layers upon layers of control and objectification by others.

So voice – in both an individual and a collective sense – is crucial. Everything works outward from that. This opens up what I and others have called a ‘*new politics of disability’* – replacing the invisibility of persons with disabilities with visibility at all levels but especially in the policy and political levels.

And you will surely have noticed that the CRPD does a really good job at blending together economic and social rights with civil and political rights.

New liberties are of little use unless underpinned by material provision. So, the equality ideal is broader and deeper than the usual guarantee of equality or non-discrimination. It points toward a strategy of inclusion - the clever blending of both sets of rights to drive an inclusion agenda forward.

It is said that the truth always emerges in an emergency. What we saw – again worldwide – was that systems reverted back to an outdated medical model of disability during Covid-19.

To me this suggests that the value shift in the CRPD has not yet sunk deep enough roots. This was reflected in under-inclusive prevention strategies, poor communications strategies, discriminatory triage for scare medical resources and heightened vulnerability in institutional settings. I am sure your region was no different.

We – like you – are hoping and planning for a more inclusive future. ‘*Build back better’* gives us an opportunity to place the inclusion agenda front and centre. What is the point of pouring good money into outdated models that just expose people to risk.

Actually, the intersectional dimensions to recovery are just as important. Never forget that the bulk of people who passed were older persons with underlying conditions. Your fight against institutionalisation is also their fight. I encourage you to build inter-sectional alliances as one way of achieving more sustainable policy.

**Secondly, your own work.** I do appreciate the many advances made in Kazakhstan and more regionally.

I applaud Uzbekistan for ratifying the treaty in 2021. I note Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan have already done so.

Welcome to the international conversation! You can learn from others – but we can learn from you too. I hope to see your national delegations at the annual UN Conference of States Parties. Don’t be shy in putting on side-panels explaining your own efforts. They will be sincerely appreciated.

## I note the address of the President of Kazakhstan to the nation in September 2021 in which he observed that persons with disabilities are under-represented and proposing a new quota for the same. This is commendable – indeed a good example of the *‘new politics of disability’* in action. I am sure he will find out that persons with disabilities have broader interests beyond their own situation which includes the building up of more inclusive societies for everybody’s benefit. All gain by widening the lens of participation.

And I note that more than 100 representative groups of youth and people with disabilities from across Kyrgyzstan attended the country’s first inclusive youth conference on sustainable development in October.

All of this bodes well for the future.

**What then of the future?**

It is all very well and good having an authoritative and well-translated instrument. But how do you put it into action? There is a word of difference between a ‘myth system’ on paper and an ‘operation system’ on the ground – in the ‘small places’ people live.

I have often pointed to Article 33 as the engine of the treaty. It imagines a process of **co-production of policy** – one that triangulates between Power (Government), Voice (civil society) and Ideas (human rights commissions, research bodies, policy institutes). Getting this going – making sure that voice is at its heart – is the key to change.

There will be many obstacles. Sometimes, systems co-opt the language of change onto to continue as before. Even a cursory reading of Max Weber tells you this. Sometimes change is stymied by vested interests. New business models will be needed and service providers should be encouraged to become allies. Often change bumps up against competing priorities. To govern is to choose and you have the heavy task of pointing out to Government the consequences of choosing and sometimes the inter-generational effects of their choices.

We all share these challenges. You are not alone. We look forward to your distinctive voices at an international level because we can all learn from each other.

I know colleagues at ODIHR will brief me on your deliberations and I look forward to learning about them.

Again, I commend you for your work so far.

Thank You.

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