UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS
SPECIAL PROCEDURES

SPECIAL RAPPORTEURS, INDEPENDENT EXPERTS & WORKING GROUPS

Human Rights Council 49th session

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Geneva, 14 March 2022

Mr. President, Distinguished members of the Human Rights Council, Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Many years ago, Eleanor Roosevelt said that "human rights begin in small places." These small places are where most people live their daily lives – on the factory floor, across the kitchen table, in the classroom and in the corridors of power. Now and then, something happens to fundamentally alter the terms of our co-existence as human beings in these places. The Industrial Revolution was one such epoch-changing moment. Artificial Intelligence is another – and is re-setting the terms of human co-existence in the 21st century as we speak.

Conscious of the need to elevate disability from a silo and to connect it with broader currents of change and challenge that face humanity, I decided to produce this Thematic Report before you. In essence, it gathers together the balance of risks as well as opportunities presented by Artificial Intelligence in the context of the rights of persons with disabilities. It comes on top of many excellent reports by other mandate holders. It does not dwell on the usual subjects such as the digital divide and privacy. Rather it focuses more specifically on how or whether Artificial Intelligence offers us the novel opportunity to drive forward inclusive equality in favour of persons with disabilities, and the kinds of risks posed by the new technology especially to existing protections against non-discrimination.

On the plus side we are delighted to announce many positive advantages particularly in the Global South where, as the World Bank points out, Artificial Intelligence can meaningfully drive forward the search for inclusive development in favour of persons with disabilities. Remarkable breakthroughs are also revealed with respect

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to personal mobility especially for blind users and especially in complicated urban landscapes. Novel peer-to peer support Apps are being developed using Artificial Intelligence in the sphere of mental health - thus helping to build a future free of coercion. Many business developers of the technology are alert to this positive potential and work collaboratively with persons with disabilities in developing their products and services. In sum, blockages that we formerly thought of as insurmountable are suddenly scalable.

On the negative side of the ledger, the predicates that underpin the algorithms that drive Artificial Intelligence can reflect and embed ableist assumptions (and indeed ageist assumptions). Disability can be 'seen' by the technology as deviant and therefore unwelcome. Persons with facial disfigurement, for example, may find themselves shunned to one side as presumptively untrustworthy. Likewise, for stammerers and others. Strikingly, such persons may be ruled out of consideration for employment without ever considering their merits and whether a 'reasonable accommodation' might assist in enabling them to perform the essential functions of a job. Further, all this can be done without the individual even knowing that it is being done to them. The prospect, therefore, of challenging such behavior is practically zero. All of which is compounded by the strength of protections under intellectual property law, and indeed international trade law, which effectively hides how the relevant systems work from full view.

The core question posed by this analysis is how humanity can harness the positive potential of Artificial Intelligence whilst mitigating its known (and often unknowable) impacts on persons with disabilities? If these negative impacts are not meaningfully addressed, then it is unlikely that public support for the technology will be as fulsome as it might otherwise be.

Our Thematic Report proposes a way forward to get the best from the technology whilst avoiding the worst. We make a series of recommendations directed first at States Parties to the CRPD. We call on States to include disability within their national Artificial Intelligence Strategies, to take care to ensure that anti-discrimination law is not undermined, that the crucial obligation of 'reasonable accommodation' continues to apply throughout and that public procurement policies explicitly take disability into account when purchasing or commissioning Artificial Intelligence products and services. With respect to the business community (developers and users) we see this as a test of business and human rights. We call for maximum transparency in Artificial Intelligence product design and application. We call on the business community to directly involve persons with disabilities in assessing risks (and opportunities). We call on the business community to expressly take account of disability in their corporate social responsibility monitoring tools especially at they apply to Artificial Intelligence and new technology. And we call for effective grievance mechanisms. We also make a series of recommendations directed at the UN system including the UN human rights mechanisms as well as national human rights institutions.

Most importantly, we call for a new space – a collaborate space – between the corporate sector, Government and civil society – to work through and realize the positive benefits of the technology and to take active steps to reverse some its known negative impacts and to avoid such impacts into the future. Otherwise, the 'furthest left behind' will simply have no chance to catch up. Given the promise of the technology, this would be a tragedy for humanity.

I thank you for your attention, and look forward to our dialogue.