Thank you Chair;

My name is Laura Mills, and I am a researcher with Amnesty International, where I focus on the rights of people with disabilities and older people in armed conflict. My team is committed to shining a light on abuses against people with disabilities in emergency situations, and ensuring that their voices and experiences are integrated into all the research we do.

Over the past five years, my team has documented numerous violations of the rights of persons with disabilities, including war crimes and crimes against humanity. Our work has taken us to Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Ukraine and Yemen.

Time and again, we have found that people with disabilities face elevated risks to their safety. They are unable to seek shelter during attacks because of physically inaccessible infrastructure. They struggle to access evacuation routes on an equal basis with others, and information about evacuations is rarely distributed in ways that are accessible. Many lose their assistive devices in the chaos of displacement.

Around the globe, we have found that people with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities in particular were at high risk of being targeted by violence: in Myanmar, for example, Amnesty International documented how soldiers have subjected people with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities to executions or arbitrary detention and torture because of their perceived “failure” to comply with a soldier’s order.

Once they are displaced, people with disabilities are routinely left behind in humanitarian responses. People with disabilities in IDP and refugee camps in Bangladesh, Nigeria and Yemen often could not access latrines, and so washed or used pans in their shelters instead. Collection points for humanitarian aid were often located far from their shelters, excluding people with disabilities. In other places, such as Ukraine, people with disabilities have been unable to access accommodation on an equal basis with others: most temporary shelters and housing are inaccessible to people with disabilities, leading to the institutionalization of at least 4,000 older people with disabilities between February and July 2022 alone.

Perhaps the greatest barrier to improving humanitarian and emergency responses for people with disabilities is their sheer invisibility in most conflict and crisis situations. In many of the countries where we work, there are no reliable statistics about people with disabilities at all. In other countries, many people with disabilities – for example older people with disabilities or people with psychosocial disabilities – are not perceived, registered or counted as such. It is extremely rare that data is disaggregated by age, gender, and type of disability. All of this hampers government and humanitarian actors’ ability to respond.

We welcome this important opportunity to contribute to this session, and hope that the Committee’s work will ensure that people with disabilities are made truly visible in situations of armed conflict and emergencies.

Thank you.