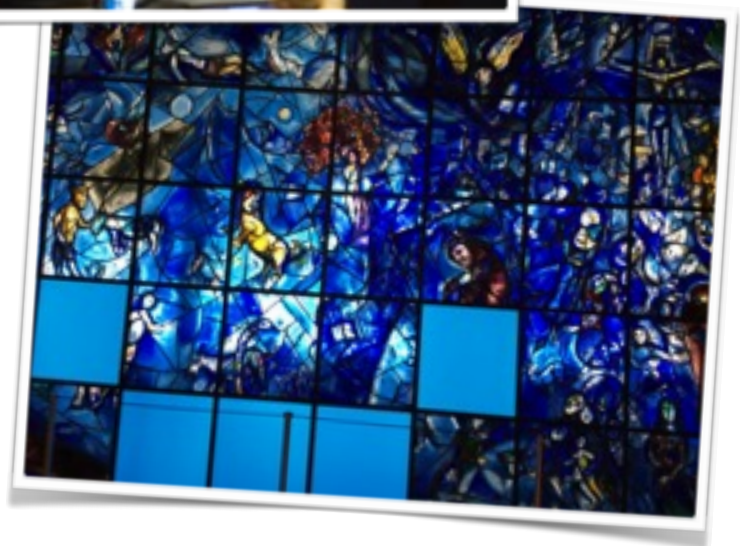




Rehabilitation International

Report 2015/2016

Reaching toward a Brighter Future



Rehabilitation International (RI Global) works to empower people with disabilities so they can enjoy their rights on an equal basis with others. It achieves this by campaigning for laws, policies and practices that respect and empower people with disabilities, and by working with partners in countries around the world to help people with disabilities gain access to education, rehabilitation, employment, health care, justice, and inclusion in all aspects of society.



RI HISTORY AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Since its inception in 1922, RI Global has been at the forefront of disability rights, working to reverse the discriminatory attitudes and practices that previously excluded and devalued people with disabilities. In 1929, RI Global, then the International Society for Crippled Children, petitioned the League of Nations to establish an office to oversee the collection of disability-related statistics. Thirty years later, as the International Society for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled, RI Global established the conceptual basis for community-based rehabilitation and created the first International Symbol of Access. From 1981 to 2006, as Rehabilitation International, RI Global Led the original campaign for the drafting and adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

One of RI Global's most important recent feats has been leading the campaign for the universal adoption of the CRPD. Signed by an unprecedented number of countries (160 to date) in 2006, the CRPD consistently shifts the way persons with disabilities are viewed - from objects who belong in wards or under-cloak, to active subjects with rights, free will and abilities, based on free and informed consent. Along the path to full CRPD ratification, RI Global World Congresses, assemblies, conferences, training sessions, publications and United Nations advocacy have brought together thousands of disability allies and activists to reframe disability issues and rethink the delivery of disability services and using a rights perspective. RI Global has also provided forums for experts in the disability field to meet, discuss and exchange experiences with an end-view: making a tangible difference in the lives of people with disabilities. RI Global once served as the parent organization for several other disability-related organizations, among them, US-based Easter Seals, the World Rehabilitation Fund, and Disabled Peoples' International.

RI GLOBAL STRUCTURE

RI Global comprises a worldwide network of grassroots organizations, service providers, researchers, academics, professionals and government agencies with members in more than 100 countries. A democratic Non-governmental organization (NGO) governed by an Executive Committee, RI Global provides both an open forum for the exchange of experience, information and research, as well as a platform from which people advocate for policies and enact programs that protect the human rights of people with disabilities. RI Global is the only international disability NGO that is both cross-disability and cross-disciplinary. This approach allows RI Global to address disability as a whole, taking into account the range of disabilities, from physical to mental to psycho-social. Headquartered in New York City, RI Global holds consultative status with the United Nations and its agencies, and has official relations with the World Health Organization. Because success depends on the unity and strength of the disability community as a whole, RI Global seeks to work collaboratively in all of its activities, with a small staff based in New York that coordinates members and partners in the execution of RI Global's programs and provides technical assistance in addition to networking, as needed.

RI GLOBAL ORGANIZATION

The RI Global Secretariat is led in New York by Secretary-General Venus Ilagan, who has spent more than 30 years as a leader in the disabilities field. A native of the Philippines, Ms. Ilagan served as the first woman chairperson of Disabled Peoples' International, participated in the



International, participated in the execution of the CRPD, continues to be involved in the work of several disabled people's networks in the Philippines, and regularly provides expertise on disability rights to international governments, and development organizations.

Ilagan is supported by a 25-member Executive Committee includes disability leaders from 17 countries and is chaired

by RI Global President Haidi Zhang Regarded as China's Helen Keller for her

outspokenness on disability rights, Zhang Haidi is the chairperson of the China Disabled Persons Federation and vice chairperson of the Shandong Writers' Association. Ms. Zhang authored her life story *Beautiful English* and English and the novel, *A Dream in Wheelchair*. Ms. Zhang holds a master's degree in Philosophy from Jilin University.



Chapter One: RI GLOBAL'S WORK

UNITED NATIONS 2015

With offices less than three city blocks from the entrance of the United Nations, Rehabilitation International has become an important presence there, especially with



the fight for complete ratification of the CRPD in the past 10 years. The following outlines some of the more visible and important events attended by RI Global members during 2015 and 2016.

2014 UN International Day of Persons with Disabilities

The 2014 International Day of persons with Disabilities took place on 3 December with Secretary-General Venus Ilagan included as one of two Civil Society Organization representatives invited to speak at the Opening Session at UN Headquarters. Under the theme, "Sustainable Development: The Promise of Technology", the day elicited conversation on ways in which organizations could harness the power of technology to promote inclusion and accessibility to help persons with disabilities shape the future of sustainable development for all.

The day prior, Ilagan participated in a panel discussion "Creating Enabling Working Environments" hosted by UN-DESA, which focused on the ways the UN has created reasonable accommodations - physical, communications, technical and other - to allow people with disabilities work at the UN and in the field. "Through increased independence and productivity, PwDs can be physically, socially, academically, recreationally and vocationally integrated into the community. Technology can

promote, increase, maintain and improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities,” Ilagan said.



53rd Session of the Commission for Social Development (CSocD53)

Just after the new year, Secretary-General Venus Ilagan attended the 2015 Civil Society Forum preceding the opening of the 53rd Session of the UN Commission for Social Development from 4-13 February. *Rethinking and Strengthening Social Development in the Contemporary World* was the theme of a development agenda designed to secure a “Life of Dignity for All”. Talks focused on economic outcomes that exacerbated the inequalities and deprivations faced by persons with disabilities; they concluded that governments, civil society and social development stakeholders must ensure that the development agenda took into account those inequalities. Without including PwDs, RI Global took the position that the Post-2015 Agenda would continue to systematically exclude and disempower the most vulnerable populations. “Only when the international community prioritizes the participation, empowerment, and full involvement of marginalized people would development be sustainable,” Ilagan told the Forum.

59th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW59)

On 12 March, as part of the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW59), RI Global participated in an event entitled *Women with Disabilities: 20 Years After Beijing*. Drawing on the core principle of “Nothing About

Us Without Us”, the informal discussion on women with disabilities took stock of existing networks with a view to strengthening their voice and perspectives in policy-dialogues at the global, regional and national levels. The event marked the the third consecutive year RI Global contributed programming to the CSW, ensuring that the rights of women with disabilities would remain a continuing focus of the organization in the years ahead. The panel featured Secretary-General Venus Ilagan, former RI Global President Anne Hawker of New Zealand and RI Global Africa Vice President Ekaete Umoh of Nigeria, who reviewed implementation of the Beijing Platform; factors that contribute to the success of mainstreaming perspectives of women and girls with disabilities in development; and methods to replicate and expand on such experiences.

UN Women

In late April 2015, UN Women released a report entitled *Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016: Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights*. RI Global's Venus Ilagan attended the release of the report and created a summary of notable facts regarding women with disabilities from the report.

Overall, however, UN Women found that national social protection floors, including basic income security and the extension of social services for children, working-age adults, older people and people with disabilities, holds significant promise for women. Other highlights include:

- “In the January 2015 Universal Periodic Review (UPR) by the Human Rights Council, certain EU countries came under criticism from its peers for the harsh impact of its austerity measures, especially on women, migrants, people with disabilities and children. Thus, seemingly ‘neutral’ policies or practices can act to put some groups at a disadvantage due to structural and historical inequalities.” [Page 37]



- “The risk of stigmatization is greatest where gender inequalities intersect with other axes of disadvantage such as class, ethnicity, disability, location or race. In certain conditional cash transfer programmes, some indigenous women did not collect their benefits because the private guards of the financial institution mistreated them while they were queuing.” [Page 140]

Copies of the report, endorsed by RI Global, may be found at progress.un.org.

UN DSPD-DESA

UN’s Division for Social Policy and Development invited RI Global to participate in an Expert Group Meeting under the theme *Disability and development: operationalizing the post-2015 development agenda for persons with disabilities* from 11-13 May in Beirut, Lebanon. In view of the emerging post-2015 development framework and the necessity to advance concrete efforts toward inclusive development, the Expert Group Meeting was convened to further strengthen disability-inclusive development implementation at global, regional and national levels.

The Meeting brought together experts from around the world to take stock of recent progress in mainstreaming disability; to review lessons learned and experiences in the implementation of disability-inclusive policies and programmes; and to explore options for and strategies to operationalize the post-2015 development agenda. The Meeting also explored specific opportunities and challenges in the Arab Region for advancing the inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities in development. RI Global and the other experts reached two clear conclusions:

1. All stakeholders should prioritise capacity building around advocacy for the implementation of the SDGs for persons with disabilities, monitoring and evaluation, and accountability, and;
2. The disability community should work more closely with other sectors (Gender, LGBT, and other marginalized groups) on ways to optimize effective management of approaches to inclusion.

2015 ECOSOC High-Level Political Forum (HLPF)

From 18-19 June, RI Global took part in a workshop on Governance, Transparency and Accountability: Major Groups and Other Stakeholders (MGoS) Collaboration toward the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) at UN headquarters in New York. The workshop discussed ways in which the mechanisms of MGoS could adapt within the review architecture to carry out the post-2015 sustainable development agenda at the national, regional and global levels, including the HLPF.

The meeting convened with remarks by Thomas Gass, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs of UN DESA, who cited the importance of a paradigm shift in development: to not leave anyone behind in both the MDGs review process, as well as the implementation of the SDGs. Gass also noted that a strong will to build from existing structures was needed, as well as the strengthening of the relationships between governments with other stakeholders. RI Global Secretary-General, Venus Ilagan, asked Mr. Gass to suggest a possible mechanism that would include stakeholders traditionally excluded from public discourse on important issues, especially PwDs. The outcome of the two-day workshop was a series of proposals for the monitoring, follow-up and review architecture for the Post-2015 Development Agenda at various levels, including the HLPF.

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), 8th Conference of States Parties (CoSP8)

RI Global participated actively in the 2015 Annual Conference of States Parties (CoSP8) on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) held 9-11 June 2015 at the UN Secretariat in New York. President Jan Monsbakken joined Secretary-General Venus Ilagan, along with Treasurer Susan Parker, Work & Employment Commission Chair Madan Kundu, Deputy Vice President for North America Mathieu Simard and RI Foundation Member Khaled Al-Mohter in representing RI Global.

During the opening plenary of CoSP8, Mr. Monsbakken informed Member-States about the global work of Rehabilitation International and later that evening

attended a welcome reception hosted by Ambassador Oh Joon of the Mission of the Republic of Korea and President of the Economic and Social Commission (ECOSOC)



for 2015-16. Ms. Ilegan spoke at a panel on global Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) in a side event organized by RI Global member, Korean Society for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities (KSRPD) in collaboration with the Mission of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations. RI Global also provided commentary at a panel *Bridging the Gap*, organized by the Permanent Mission of the State of Qatar and the Shafallah

Center for Children with Special Needs, and co-organized a one-day Civil Society Forum with the International Disability Alliance and Disabled Peoples International.

Also, during the CoSP8, Monsbakken and Ilegan met with UNICEF's Adviser on Children with Disabilities, Roseangela Berman-Bieler, to receive a debriefing on UNICEF's ongoing initiatives for children with disabilities. Bieler said her team had implemented an internal policy that mandated all structures financed by the organization included access features for the disabled. UNICEF had also been working to ensure that one percent of all resources used for travel among UNICEF management and staff was earmarked for promoting access.

Friends of the CRPD

In July 2015, RI Global was one of only two disability organizations invited to the "Friends of CRPD Working Breakfast" hosted by ECOSOC President and CoSP Bureau Chair Ambassador Oh Joon and held at the Mission of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations. The meeting facilitated the discussion of measures to make the working environment of the United Nations more accessible and inclusive of persons with disabilities. The UN had yet to develop a comprehensive approach to accessibility, Oh said, adding that he has sought, in consultation with UN Secretary-

General Ban Ki-moon, a draft resolution compelling the General Assembly to request a comprehensive report of the Secretary-General on the ways in which the UN has actualized a disability-inclusive working environment in its facilities at the Secretariat.

RI Global made several recommendations, which included advising that UN staff with disabilities should form a committee that regularly monitored progress of the renovations to ensure that all UN facilities were accessibility-compliant. RI Global also suggested that the UN Secretariat hold accessibility walk-through activities in several phases during the renovation process rather than retrofit facilities after the UN completed construction of the New York campus.

2015 Sustainable Development Goals

From 25-27 September, Member States met at the United Nations in New York to adopt the post-2015 Development Agenda, otherwise known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2015-2030. The event marked a historic turning point in the lives of persons with disabilities worldwide, who, in a change of policy, included them in the process.



In 2000, the UN had established the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which considerably effected change on the levels of poverty and hunger around the world. However, the MDGs did not include the needs of people with disabilities, although 80 percent of people with disabilities around the world live in poverty. The UN's new 15-year plan for global development comprised **17 Sustainable**

Development Goals (SDGs), which now include the needs of those with disabilities. These are:

Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all

- **4.5:** by 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations

- **4.a:** build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all

Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries

- **10.2:** by 2030 empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status

Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

- **8.5:** by 2030 achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value

Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

- **11.2:** by 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons

- **11.7:** by 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, particularly for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities

On 24 November 2015 a draft resolution entitled ***Toward the full realization of an inclusive and accessible United Nations for persons with disabilities***, was adopted in the Third Committee of the General Assembly. The resolution requested the establishment of a unified and comprehensive policy framework ensuring that the UN’s working environment became fully inclusive and accessible. RI committed to keeping governments, the UN, and other powerful bodies accountable to people with disabilities.

UN Habitat III

For the world’s one billion persons living with disabilities, urban areas – if continually ill-planned and built – presented significant challenges, including lack of accessible infrastructure, facilities and basic public services. Ill-planned urbanization has already contributed to growing inequalities and exclusion of persons with

disabilities and other marginalized groups.



RI Secretary General Venus Ilagan spoke at the ***UNDESA-DSPD Forum on Disability Inclusion and Accessible Urban Development***, held at the United Nations Office in Nairobi, Kenya from 28-30 October. The forum reviewed existing policies and practices concerning disability-inclusive urban development and aimed to put together a set of

recommendations that advanced disability inclusion in the global discourse on the **New Urban Agenda (UN-Habitat III)**. RI Global, which has been following urban disabled development for the past 50 years, mandated that constructing cities and

towns to accessible standards and making them inclusive of all people, especially those with disabilities, was essential for sustainable urban development.

2015 International Day of Persons with Disabilities

On December 3, the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD), RI Global organized and participated in various events under the theme “Inclusion matters: access and empowerment for people of all abilities.” The day also took on three sub-themes: making cities inclusive and accessible for all; improving disability data and statistics; and including persons with “invisible” disabilities in society and development. The UN held an opening session and a panel discussion on each of the three sub-themes at UN

Headquarters, as well as the official commemoration of the IDPD at United Nations Headquarters, which RI Global and UN-DESA organized.



“The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the outcome of the General Assembly High Level Meeting on Disability and Development both emphasized the important role of persons with disabilities in all aspects of society and development,” said UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon as he opened the session. “As the world has set out to implement the 2030 agenda, persons with disabilities must be recognized for what they are: effective agents of change whose contributions bring enormous benefits.”

RI Global Secretary Venus Ilagan discussed accessible travel and universal design at a panel about making urban areas inclusive and accessible. “Accessibility is a growing market, promising a handsome return on investment,” Ilagan said. “In order to realize the goal of access and inclusion, there is a need to approach projects from the outset using universal design. Access does not only benefit persons with disabilities or those with special needs, it benefits us all.”

“Accessibility has long been major challenge in sustainable urban development,” added Eric Zhang of UN-DESA. “We need disability-inclusive and responsive urban policy.” Other topics discussed at the UN event included disability data collection, disability inclusion in the Sustainable Development Goals and progress of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. RI Global ended this year’s IDPD at a reception held by the Permanent Missions of Mexico, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Turkey and Australia, featuring Indonesia and Korean musicians with disabilities.

As a coda to 2015, on 15 and 16 December, RI Global attended the **World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)** annual review meeting at United Nations Headquarters in New York to make the point that information technology was key to sustainable development, especially for disabled persons.

Chapter Two: RI GLOBAL WORK UNITED NATIONS 2016



54th Session of the Commission for Social Development (CSocD54)

Kicking off the season under the new 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, the 54th Session of the Commission for Social Development (CSocD54) brought together civil society groups, country leaders and diplomats in ***Rethinking and Strengthening Social Development in the Contemporary World***. Overall, the Commission focused its discussion on the critical role of social policy and development in achieving inclusive, just, and socially sustainable development for all. Breakout sessions included significant time on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the UN's new agenda.

Rehabilitation International Secretary-General Venus Ilagan was among those faces of civil society on the dais when UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon called on the contingent to “build on those successes” of lifting people out of extreme poverty, boosting food security, advancing universal primary education, promoting women’s

empowerment, and reducing maternal and child mortality by “the full-inclusion of persons with disabilities”. Ban cited the increasing interest among decision makers for accessibility and the full inclusion of the one billion people with disabilities who make up a large percentage of the global population.

Earlier in the Conference, Ilagan spoke at a Department for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) panel on addressing the structural issues concerning inequalities faced by persons with disabilities in society and development. In her talk, Ilagan highlighted the many challenges disabled people face in accessing employment. “If one earns an income and is managing his or her own finances, he or she can direct the course of his or her life and would enjoy better recognition and treatment from those in her family, community and society,” Ilagan said. She suggested, among other things, targeted recruitment, training and advancement opportunities of persons with disabilities; strong accommodations-related policies and practices; and a positive corporate culture, including in the level of top management.

59th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW59)

In December 2015 a group of women in the village of Chancho, Ethiopia visited the local clinic to give the nurses a much-needed hand. They changed sheets and tidied up the ten bed-ridden patients; brought products from the local dairy farm to share; and chatted - comforting the sick women.

This solidarity wouldn't likely happen without the Women's Health Association of Ethiopia (WHAE), a local NGO established in 2011 to train and unite women in rural communities. Supported by the Norwegian Women's Public Health Association (NKS), the two organizations met and shared insights on working together to achieve the new Sustainable Development Goals during the **60th Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations** from 14-24 March. Jan Monsbakken, the President of RI Global who moderated the panel, said the NKS “has always been a close partner of Rehabilitation International” in its mandate. “Twenty percent of the women they work with include women with disabilities,” he added. “NKS has contributed to building disabilities and the overall health of women into the Norwegian welfare system.

Overall, women with disabilities raised significant attention at the CSW60, as disabled panelists discussed the impact of the Sustainable Development Goals on their lives in the context of government program cuts on women with disabilities (Goal 1: Poverty); of sexual and reproductive health and rights, including forced sterilization (Goal 3: Health); of gender-based and sexual violence (Goal 5: Gender Equality), and finally, of access to justice (Goal 16: Peace and Justice). One exhibit at CSW60 brought specific attention to the plight of women with disabilities: Silent Tears, a multi-media project by internationally renowned photographer Belinda Mason. The exhibition - still featured at the Silent Tears website - documents violence against women with disabilities, and the violence that has caused women's disabilities.

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), 9th Conference of States Parties (CoSP9)



Before a particularly emotional concert honoring 10 years of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) at the United Nations last month, Victor Calise, the Commissioner of the City of New York's Office for People with

Disabilities, said he only saw people of “all abilities” gathered before him, not those with disabilities.

The **9th annual Conference of the States Parties (CoSP9)** on the CRPD only illuminated Calise’s observation, as hundreds of activists and policymakers communed to challenge, change and celebrate the document that grants status and rights for the nearly one billion people with disabilities around the world. The RI Global Secretariat also helped the UN ring in the Convention’s 10-year anniversary with an awards presentation, a co-sponsored panel and lots of member advocacy.

During the sessions, RI Global made an intervention on the floor of the General Assembly to endorse and support the Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) in Humanitarian Action, which lifts barriers that persons with disabilities face in accessing relief, protection and recovery support, as well as ensures their participation in the development, planning and implementation of humanitarian programmes. President Monsbakken also made an intervention stressing on the need for building inclusive societies in which everyone can participate and enjoy equal human rights.

RI Global Secretary-General Venus Ilagan moderated a panel of experts that discussed the World Health Organization’s (WHO) Gaate Initiative, which would help make possible access for every disabled person to high quality affordable assistive products. And RI Global capped off the week with a presentation of the Presidential Award to outgoing CoSP President H.E. Ambassador Oh Joon, Permanent Representative of the Mission of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations, with a Presidential Plaque in appreciation of Oh’s exemplary dedication to disability and rehabilitation. Before Oh presented the program of the evening “Beautiful Concert: Celebration of CRPD 10”, he thanked RI Global for its “95 years of working with the United Nations to constantly put disability rights on docket of nations around the world”.

2016 ECOSOC High-Level Political Forum (HLPF)

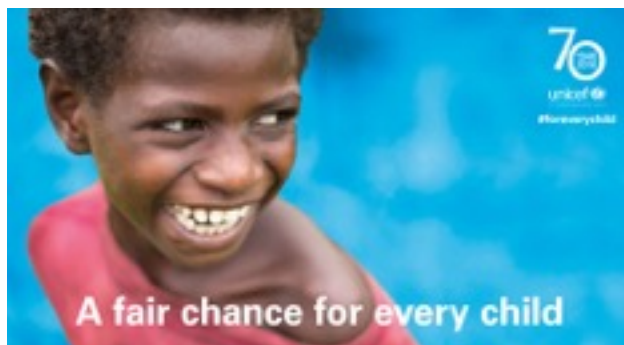
The 2016 High-level Political Forum on sustainable development closed on 20 July with the adoption of a Ministerial Declaration that called for universal adaptation

of the Post-2015 Agenda. As the meeting ended, the ECOSOC President and chair of the 2016 Forum, Ambassador Oh Joon, Ambassador of the republic of Korea to the United Nations, outlined some of the key messages.

“The SDGs must be implemented in their entirety”, he said. “We must make globalization work for everyone”. The launch of the first global SDGs Report and the presentation of the **2016 Global Sustainable Development Report** were highlights of the meeting, as were voluntary national reviews by 22 countries on the steps they are taking towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. To date, 163 States and the European Union have ratified or acceded to the Convention. The CRPD Committee has received about 85 initial reports from States parties, working actively to monitor national progress.

UNICEF Releases 2016 State of the World’s Children

In July, the United Nations Children’s Fund released its 2016 State of the World’s Children report, entitled ***A fair chance for every child***. The report highlighted



results achieved for young people across the full continuum of humanitarian action in 2015, while assessing activities in all programme areas. In disability rights for children, UNICEF:

- Launched a three-year partnership with BRAC International to support Communication for Development

initiatives for inclusive education.

- Called on nations to support equitable public financing and child-focused budgeting, at the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, held in Addis Ababa in July 2015, UNICEF supported vaccination campaigns of 350 million doses of oral polio vaccine to help Nigeria become polio-free in September; the world is now on track to be certified polio-free by 2019. Check out *A fair chance for every child*.

UN Habitat III, 16 October: Quito, Ecuador

About 6.25 billion people, 15 per cent of them with disabilities, are predicted to be living in urban centres by 2050. Depending on how they are planned and built, urban environments, can impede or enable access, participation and inclusion. DESA will spend a day with civil society forums discussing the inclusion of disabled persons in cities before UN Habitat III.

Before she arrives in Edinburgh for the World Congress, RI Global Treasurer



Susan Parker will attend Habitat III in Quito. At the conference, the UN is expected to adopt the New Urban Agenda, which will guide the sustainable and inclusive development of the world's cities for next 20 years. The latest draft New Urban Agenda was released on 28 July, one of the last versions before the Habitat III conference in October. Along with the Nippon Foundation, the GAATES Alliance and Disabled People's International, RI Global co-sponsored a forum in June: "Ways forward Towards a Disability Inclusive and Accessible New Urban Agenda", which aimed to make a concrete appeal for disability inclusion in the final document.

Chapter Three: RI GLOBAL COMMISSIONS

Within the structure of RI Global there exist seven Commissions of specialists and experts on issues in disability, which assist in developing and expanding programming and activities in accordance with RI Global's strategic goals. These Commissions meet throughout the year to examine the most pressing topics for people with disabilities around the world and devise an agenda of action. The years 2015-2016 proved engrossing for the Commissions, as the Post-2015 agenda put new goals on the table and previous objectives, such as Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DiDRR) and Return to Work (RtW). The following provides a look at the work of the Commissions in both 2015 and 2016.



RI Global Commission on Work & Employment

RI Global's Commission on Work and Employment promotes the rights of people with disabilities to participate in labour, trade unions and other integrated settings, thereby empowering them to be productive members of society. The Commission carries out its mission by actively Implementing Article 27 of United

Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities in collaboration with public and private entities, NGOs and trade unions. This includes:

- Developing an online Resource Network of Experts to advise on issues of disability employment

WEC HIGHLIGHT – Return to Work (RtW): On 20 September 2015, the RI Global Work and Employment Commission (WEC) met in Hong Kong to define “standard skills for RtW professionals”. RtW is a concept by which varying approaches help employees work while still recuperating.

Lots of terms and educational programs for “disability managers” exist all over the world, the Commission determined, but a benchmark had still not been established. RI Global WEC set about adopting a universal framework in Return to Work (RtW) competencies for universities to use in the education of rehabilitation counselors. Students, according to the WEC Commission, need to be able to identify strategies to reduce attitudinal barriers affecting people with disabilities, as well as to demonstrate an understanding of stereotypical views toward individuals with a disability and the negative effects of these views on rehabilitation outcomes. Prospective RtW counselors should also have a minimum of 100 hours of supervised rehabilitation counseling with at least 40 hours of direct service to people with disabilities. The Executive Committee will decide on the standards by the end of 2016.

- Conducting scientific meetings in collaboration with organizations such as Global Applied Disability Research and Information Network (GLADNET), the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the World Health Organization (WHO)
- Providing technical assistance in developing academic and professional opportunities for rehabilitation and placement personnel in local colleges and universities.

- Offering technical assistance to member nations in collaborative research projects designed to identify evidence-based practices capable of enhancing employment outcomes and quality of life for people with disabilities.

WEC HIGHLIGHT – Abilympics: South Korea took the most medals for the sixth straight year at the 2016 International Competition for the People with Special Needs and Disabilities, also known as Abilympics, held in Bordeaux, France. The competition brought together 650 professionals from 33



countries to challenge each other in more than 40 tests in five categories: crafts, services, technology, energy and industry. Abilympics participants demonstrated their various abilities from preparing fine French cuisine to creating projects of modern industrial design.

RI Global Secretary-General Venus Ilagan attended the 9th contest, reminding competitors that a rights-based approach to development, which Abilympics champions, “levels the playing field” so that youth or working age, can access jobs, education and other vocational services. “Often, employers see more the disability rather than the ability to deliver good performance and output,” Ilagan said. “When given the opportunity not only to showcase, but also to demonstrate their skills and abilities, people with disabilities can be productive members of their communities.”

RI Global Commission on Education

Rehabilitation International’s Commission on Education advises on the creation and promotion of educational opportunities for children and youth with disabilities. The Commission also facilitates the provision of integrated services and inclusive quality education for the participation of disabled people. The work broadly comprises:

- Fostering the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability with a with special focus on Article 24 - Education.
- Advocating the provision of facilities and services for inclusive education in different regions by Regional Chairpersons of Education Commission.
- Sharing the successful experiences of other countries in inclusive education with a view to replicate the same in respective countries/regions with appropriate modifications.

EDUCATION COMMISSION HIGHLIGHT – Expert Meeting on Global Cooperation on Assistive Technology: On 29 October 2015, Premier Li Keqiang of China and Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany attended and addressed the opening ceremony of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) High-Level Meeting on Disability and Global Conference on Assistive Devices and Technology at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China.



The meeting was organized by Rehabilitation International, the World Health Organization (WHO) and China Disabled Persons' Federation. Li Keqiang stressed that after decades of unremitting efforts, China still needed to further improve the public service system for the disabled; increase the supply of public products and public services; help people with disabilities achieve in economic and social development; and never allow disabled to be "left behind". Angela Merkel expressed that inclusiveness was the core concept behind the framework the ASEM had opened up new areas for Germany-China cooperation.

- Conducting scientific meetings on education related issues at Regional RI Global Assemblies.
- Initiating and following up on distance and e-learning facilities for youth with disabilities.

RI Global Commission on Technology and Accessibility (ICTA)

RI Global's International Commission on Technology and Accessibility (ICTA) broadly focuses on the promotion of accessibly built and virtual environments, including assistive technology, as well as maintains a forum facilitating the exchange of ideas and good practices, notably in the areas of housing, public transportation, communications, technical aids and universal design.

ICTA HIGHLIGHT – RI Global Partners with Otto Bock for Assistive Health Technology: The OttoBock HealthCare Group, which produces mobility products for the disabled, in Fall of 2015 signed a memorandum of understanding with RI Global to partner on projects that aimed at improving availability of Assistive Health Technology (AHT) for disabled persons. Ottobock and RI Global will jointly promote the importance and relevance of access to AHT for mobility at international conferences and congresses, as well as support the WHO-GATE initiative on AHT. Each year, a Steering Committee will review the progress of the partnership and advise on ways to keep advancing RTW agenda, as a key part of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Further adaption of products such as the Michelangelo prosthetic hand, the C-Brace orthotronic mobility system and other orthotics and prosthetics - in alignment with the UN Convention of the Rights of Disabilities (CRDP) - have begun in the Asia Pacific region, with a report due at the end of the year.

ICTA also works to sensitize decision makers in the public and private sectors, as well as community leaders, regarding the obstacles faced by persons with disabilities and offer possible solutions through technologies. The members of the

various ICTA sub-commissions constitute a voluntary network of experts in the area of technology and accessibility, notably specialists in the integration and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, developers of technological aides, human resources specialists, experts in the design of accessible environments, representatives of civil society and experts from government and the academe.

RI Global Commission on Health and Function

RI Global's Commission on Health and Function promotes the well-being of persons with disabilities, supports the prevention of disability and strengthens gender sensitive rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities. The Commission, through its regular work and meetings around the world, has a mission to:

- Work closely on health issues with the WHO/UNICEF/UN agencies and international or national organizations.
- Provide technical support in health/rehab/assistive technology programmes for persons with disabilities.
- Enable training programmes for medical and paramedical professionals for the welfare of persons with disabilities.
- Encourage Community-based Rehabilitation principles through a primary health care approach.
- Advocate principles of barrier free/right-based inclusive societies for persons with disabilities.

RI Global Commission on Leisure, Recreation & Physical Activities

Rehabilitation International's Commission on Leisure, Recreation & Physical Activities promotes the right for interactive lifestyle for all people with disabilities in educational, physical, social and cultural activities. The LRPA Commission holds annual meeting in connection with the RI Global's Regional Conferences and also carries out email discussions to facilitate participation in various projects throughout the year, especially around the bidding for three world events: Abilympics, Senior

Games and the International Lions Club's Special Olympics. Generally, the Commission promote implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities with a special emphasis on Article 30 by:

COMMISSION ON PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES HIGHLIGHT – RI Attends the Rio Paralympics: The Rio 2016 Paralympic Games kicked off on 7 September at Rio's iconic Maracana Stadium, with more than 4,000 athletes, representing more than 160 teams, Highlights of the Ceremony, whose theme was "Every Body Has A Heart" - reflecting on the human condition - included the lighting of the Paralympic cauldron with a flame that travelled across all five regions of Brazil over seven days, with 500 torchbearers taking part; and the live creation of a work of art by Muniz, which used 500 plates to form a gigantic mosaic.



RI Global President Jan Monsbakken watched athletes that spanned the globe and sport - from Iraq War veterans turned triathletes to teenage sprinters battling cerebral palsy. They included Daniel Dias (Brazil), who was born with malformed upper and lower limbs, and began swimming at the age of 16; Melissa Stockwell (United States), an US Army first lieutenant who lost her left leg in an IED attack in Iraq, and was among the favorites in the PT2 class for the Triathlon; Zahra Nematy (Iran), the 31-year-old the reigning women's recurve champion in the W1/W2 wheelchair class; and Jayson Smyth (Ireland), the fastest Paralympian on earth who holds the world record of 10.43 seconds over 100m, although he is legally blind.

- Developing and disseminating best practice in the LRPA for persons living with disabilities and elderly people.

- Enhancing cooperative relationships with international agencies such as UN, Human Rights, International Disability Alliance (IDA), the International Paralympic Committee (IPC), UNESCO, WHO, and the International Lions Clubs to keep abreast of the latest happenings in the LRPA realm.

RI Global Commission on Social Activities

RI Global's Commission on Social Activities RI Global's Social Commission advances knowledge- and evidence-based practice to support the psychosocial functioning of people with disabilities in order to achieve maximum richness in their participation in society as citizens. It also engages in the capacity building of groups and communities in various situations to promote and implement the Convention on the Rights of Persons of Disabilities (CRPD), as well as disability inclusiveness throughout all sectors of society. The Social Commission upholds the principles set forth by CRPD, and emphasizes that:

- Society should be designed to enable full participation by all citizens; if not it is the failure of society not people with disabilities.
 - People with disabilities should be enabled to determine the goals of their rehabilitation and to exercise the same choice as others about their human relationships, the community and the environment in which they wish to live
- As Rehabilitation International moved its permanent office from downtown Manhattan to a new space at 866 United Nations Plaza - next door to the UN Secretariat - so did the organization develop closer ties with the international body and many Member States around the world to fight for a global standard of inclusion. Just over a month later, the RI Global Executive Committee held its annual meeting in Hong Kong from 19-20 September 2015, which was hosted by the Hong Kong Joint Council on Disability. During the conference, newly elected RI Global President, Haidi Zhang, announced a donation of 500,000 RMB (approximately USD\$78,000) from the Chinese Disabled Persons' Federation (CDPF) to support the implementation of RI Global's new Membership Strategy for Africa.

Chapter Four: RI GLOBAL REGIONS

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Rehabilitation International: EUROPE

Europe has a long tradition (nearly 100 years) of providing rehabilitation as part of social security. In the last years the member-countries of the European Union (EU) have been searching for answers regarding social services based on the UN-Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, especially as some European countries have reduced their high standard in order to cut state costs, thus forcing stakeholders to create their own rehabilitative measures. Article 26 CRPD (Rehabilitation) and Art. 27 (Employment) strengthen legal-based positions of the individual disabled person against the state.

But as European leaders have found, rehabilitation opens a return on investments. Not only have social insurance carriers and employers decided to invest in rehabilitation to increase employability and reduce early retirement, but politicians

have also been confronted with the pressure of financing community-based rehabilitation in order guarantee equal standards for all persons under international treaties, including the CRPD.

A recent report authored by the National Secretaries of RI Global Europe, Dr. Joachim Breuer (Germany), Francois Perl (Belgium), and Friedrich Mehrhoff (Germany), "Return to work of people suffering from chronic diseases in the EU" was introduced in Brussels in February 2016. Since then, RI Global members in Europe have discussed finding partners within the EU for promoting rehabilitation in every EU country at two meetings in Berlin (March/August 2016) and Francois Perl has begun collaboration with the European Social Insurance Partners (ESIP)

In other news, RI Global Europe assisted Shaw Trust in preparing the World Congress in Edinburgh. Roy O'Shaughnessy (CEO), the National Secretary of RI Global UK, has been nominated by RI Global Europe for the position of Vice-President of Europe along with Perl as his Deputy. RI Global is looking to start up partnerships in Slovenia and RI Global Slovakia has declared a renewed relationship with the International Secretariat.



Rehabilitation International: MENA

RI Global Does Early Habitat III Outreach in UAE: From 11-12 October 2015, RI Global's Secretary General traveled to Dubai to take part in the Dubai Inclusive Development Forum, a strategic event organized by The Executive Council of Dubai under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Mansoor bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Chairman of the Higher Committee for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The forum was part of the "My Community...A City For Everyone" initiative, launched in November 2013, which is aimed at integrating governmental and non-governmental efforts to make Dubai a disability-friendly city by 2020. The interactive platform allowed participants and government task forces to benefit from international experiences in the development of inclusive development policies and

their application in various sectors. It featured more than 30 global and local speakers, including Ilagan, and over 500 attendees.

The knowledge gained from the event will serve to inform the development of programs and policies that serve health, education, employment, social protection and urban development in Dubai and beyond.



Rehabilitation International: SOUTH AMERICA

On 25 June 2015, RI Colombia organized a meeting with various stakeholders in Bogota to explore possibilities of expanding their current network in order to play a more active role in the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which Colombia ratified in 2011. At the meeting, organized by Professor Karin Del Rocio Garzon of Del Rosario University, RI Global Secretary-General Venus Ilagan made a presentation on the various initiatives of RI Global, including the work it has carried out regarding the implementation of the CRPD and the potential ways the organization could collaborate with the multi-stakeholder groups in Colombia.

The International Secretariat came away with an agreement with RI Global Colombia - based at the Del Rosario University - to explore specific projects aimed at their common goals, as well as the branch's active participation in various international conferences and events to share experiences that could benefit other countries of similar economic and demographic makeup. RI Global Colombia also agreed to help surrounding countries in South America in the effective implementation of the CRPD. Ilagan expressed her appreciation on the diversity and variety of expertise and skills among those who attended the meeting, among them representatives of Colombia's legal community, rehabilitation service providers, persons with disabilities, parent advocates, law enforcers, representatives from the defense ministry and support groups.



Rehabilitation International: NORTH AMERICA

RI Global Participates in Disability Pride: On 12 July 2015, the first-ever Disability Pride NYC Parade, a celebration of people with disabilities and the 25th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), took place in New York City and a year later, more than 5,000 disabled people rolled, motored and strolled up Broadway during one of the largest gatherings celebrating and advocating for disability rights in the United States.

RI Secretary-General, Venus Ilagan, joined Daniela Bas, the Director of the Division for Social Policy and Development the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Victor Calise, the commissioner of the New York City Mayor's Officer for People with Disabilities and Oh Joon the South Korean ambassador to the UN in helping New York



remember that people with disabilities belong to society, deserve equal rights and should honor themselves," she said.

During a rally before the parade, Richard Buery, New York's Deputy Mayor for Strategic Policy Initiatives, announced the city's first-ever report on the state of people with disabilities, as well as interagency plans to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities across the five boroughs. "With this plan, the we are paving the way for the rest of the country, bringing together city agencies to prioritize accessibility to resources and services,"

he told a cheering crowd. Vendors and informational kiosks lined the route, and rallies at both ends celebrated disabled persons' unique place in society in addition to their demand for equal rights. "I commend the leading role of New York City in showing the world the pride that people with disabilities have in exercising their civil rights and freedoms," said UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in a statement read by Ambassador Oh. "As the US continues to implement the Americans with Disabilities Act, let us continue to take concrete action together for inclusive and accessible societies for all."



Rehabilitation International: ASIA PACIFIC

RI Global Presents Presidential Award to M.B. Lee: For his work in setting up the foundation of RI Global Asia, as well as securing RI Global's Headquarters in New York, the organization presented a 2015 Presidential Award to M.B. Lee at its annual General Assembly in Hong Kong on 21 September.

Lee, a paraplegic, was a former head of the Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation (HKSR) which provides diversified and multi-facet services to people with disabilities, chronic illnesses and/or problems of ageing. In the 1990s, he and then-RI Global President, the late Dr. Harry Fang, bought the office condominium that housed RI Global for the next 25 years and enabled the organization to maintain active involvement and engagement with the United Nations and other important actors in the field of rehabilitation and disability. Lee also recently provided a gift to support the participation of RI Global members from developing countries in the 23rd World Congress.

RI Global President Helps Unveil Chinese Disabilities Stamp Collection: Zhang Haidi, incoming President of RI Global and the chairperson of the China Disabled Persons' Federation (CDPF) was on hand in late 2015 to witness the first lady of China, Madam Liyuan Peng, unveil a United Nations custom stamp sheet to highlight initiatives that promote equal access for people with disabilities.

In her remarks after the presentation Peng, the wife of President Xi Jinping, said that the stamp demonstrated the importance China and the UN – in its 70th year – attached to work being done to help persons with disabilities. She noted that not only had Chinese government achieved major progress in helping the estimated 85 million people with disabilities, but also, all of Chinese society had played an important role in their adaptation. “It is the responsibility for society to boost the development of support for the well-being of people with disabilities, and to make every disabled to be cared and respected,” she said. The stamp was produced by the China Disabled Persons' Federation (CDPF), the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the UN Postal Administration.



Zhang said this month that China’s State Council adopted a plan to regularly subsidize the most severely disabled people and those at the poverty level. It also adopted a comprehensive mandate that provides guidance on improving the livelihood of people with disabilities, so that by 2020 they can enter into a moderately prosperous society with their Chinese peers.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who met with Zhang, said that the stamp’s issue highlighted the importance of ensuring the full inclusion of people with disabilities into all aspects of society, and symbolized the UN's enduring commitment to work with and for all social groups for a better future. “As we embark on the crucial test of implementation (of the 2030 Agenda), let us recognize that realizing our vision will require the inclusion of persons with disabilities – their aspirations, their concerns and, above all, their contributions,” Ban said.

RI Global Partners with Japanese on Independent Living: Members of the Japan Council on Independent Living Centers visited RI Global Headquarters on 3 August 2016 to seek the NGO’s support in promoting the Global Summit on

Independent Living to be held in October 2017 in Washington D.C. The Council, headed by Mr. Kozo Hirashita and Mr. Noboru Imamura, also expressed interest in learning more about RI Global's work regarding the Independent Living movement. RI Global member, the United States International Council in Disability (USICD) based in Washington D.C., has been closely working with the Japanese organization for the holding of the global summit on Independent Living. RI Secretary-General Venus Ilagan provided the Japanese team with suggestions on how to promote the event and ensure that the IL summit is attended by representatives of disability organizations as well as those from governments and other NGOs. "The IL concept has been proven as an effective way for persons with disabilities to live productive and self-determined lives. Policymakers need not reinvent the wheel," Ilagan said during the meeting. "Rather, they should look closer and consider the IL concept as a way to realize the vision of self-reliance and independent living for persons with disabilities, especially those living in developing countries where resources are limited at best."



RI Global: SOUTHEAST ASIA and AUSTRALIA

RI Global Helps Southeast Asian Nations Study Disability

Participation: Early in 2015, the Institute on Disability and Public Policy (IDPP), a collaborative think tank on disability policy for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region of the United Nations invited RI Global Secretary General Venus Ilagan to participate in a study to

help researchers understand the factors that enhance or limit the participation of persons with disabilities in the United Nations system and broader global governance processes.

The resulting report, "Participation of Persons with Disabilities in the UN System and Broader Global Governance Processes", was presented on 9 June 2015 at the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CoSP8), by Dr. Derrick L. Cogburn, the Executive Director of the IDPP and an associate professor at American University's School of International Service. The study's preliminary findings concluded that practices, such as the conducting of meetings in multimedia formats for persons with disabilities, as well as making side events universally accessible,

further advanced the effective participation of persons with disabilities. The Nippon Foundation, a social innovation foundation, had ensured that the Third World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai, Japan earlier in 2015 had been made completely accessible for persons with disabilities, and, as a result, more than 200 persons with disabilities contributed to the discussions on implementation of inclusive disaster risk reduction resulting in a more robust Sendai Framework.

For the study, Cogburn relied on field examples and qualitative methods that included interviews, focus groups and content analysis, as well as quantitative methods, such as surveys and social network analysis from NGO leaders, UN officials and other civil society groups. Ilagan provided many insights to the study team, tapping into her three decades of work in the disabilities field, in addition to her broad personal and professional experience regarding global governance and disability.

Chapter Five: RI GLOBAL ISSUES

Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DiDRR)

A new framework on Disaster Risk Reduction was officially adopted on 18 March 2015 at the Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai, Japan. RI Global participated in the Sendai conference and is proud to have been part of the inclusion of disability in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030. There are many references to disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction throughout the framework, which was a decisive improvement on previous versions.



Research has indicated that persons with disabilities are two to four times more likely to die during natural disasters than those without disabilities - specific considerations for DiDRR range from physical infrastructure needs to early warning announcements. The new framework also included a commitment to disaggregated data on disability, as well as an incorporation of the principles of Universal Design. The RI Global Task Force on Disability-Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction worked hard to highlight the need for disability perspectives in DiDRR negotiations around the world and took part in preparatory consultations in Geneva in July 2014. Since then, As with all new frameworks, implementation of these inclusive plans remained high on the list of priorities; RI Global's work to make this happen will continue in the years to come.

The Nippon Foundation ensured that the conference and relevant public forums were accessible for persons with disabilities in all aspects of the proceedings. As a result, the active participation of more than 200 persons with disabilities contributed to the fruitful discussions. RI Global looks to apply the same practices to other UN conferences and meetings, particularly in the ongoing work and implementation of a post-2015 development agenda.

The Universal Symbol of Accessibility

By the late 1960s, as the disability movement grew, countries across the Western World started using different symbols to address accessibility laws. Sensing the problem, then RI Global Secretary-General Norman Acton asked Karl Montan, the Chair of the RI International Commission for Technical Aids (ICTA), if the commission could come up with a practical symbol, readily identifiable from a reasonable distance that was self-descriptive. A Danish graphic design student submitted the winning

design: a simple motif of a stick figure using a wheelchair to indicate barrier-free access. RI Global's International Symbol of Accessibility quickly gained wide acceptance - with the imprimatur of the United Nations, it became the universally used sign.



As the politics of disability grew more nuanced, a growing audience has lobbied for an updated version of the International Symbol. The leader in the discussions, the Accessible Icon Project, has created a new logo with a forward-leaning head and motioning arms indicating the figure as the "driver" or decision maker about his or her mobility. New York adopted the new symbol in

2014 and Connecticut has considered the changes, as have several Western states. The debate regarding the merits of the new vs. old symbol has also started to enter the fold of various activist organizations, including RI Global. The International Organization for Standardization has argued against the new design, citing universal recognition of the original one. Some disability rights activists also believe the new symbol implies prejudice toward people with more serious disabilities.

Proponents of the new symbol maintain they want the symbol to represent a new acceptance toward PwDs – one that does not underestimate them any longer. They believe the redesigned icon could prompt more funding and better social programs for PwDs. It's been suggested that a disability activist organization take the lead in bringing all parties to the table. This issue could hit daybooks in 2017.

Protecting Disabled Women and Girls

Nawael, a 34-year-old Syrian refugee in a wheelchair who had been staying in a camp near Athens with her husband and three children for more than ten days had not been able to wash for days, or even weeks. Her husband will carry her to the door of the toilet and once inside, random women help her use it. "I don't sleep at night because my body is itchy," she recently told a researcher with Human Rights Watch. "Ten days ago, I got my period and I swear to God, I still haven't had a shower. And I [usually] pray, but given that I haven't had a shower, I can't pray."



Life for a disabled refugee is difficult, at best. Life for a disabled female refugee can, at times, prove a lesson in the tenacity beyond the pale, as a group of disability advocates discovered during a UN General Assembly panel discussion “Advancing the rights, well-being and perspectives of women and girls with disabilities” on 16 September. Advocates from RI Global HRW, the Women’s Refugee Commission and UNICEF and other agencies gathered for the UN DESA-led discussion, which also included the Japanese ambassador to the UN, H.E. Koro Besso, to help governments, humanitarian organizations, and donors – overwhelmed with many competing priorities during emergencies – to find the way forward in ensuring that the unique needs and concerns of women with disabilities are addressed in humanitarian efforts.

Eight million of some 50 million displaced persons have a disability.



“Stories like this are just one of many that open our eyes to see that it’s not one size fits all when it comes to the conditions of people in the camps,” said Venus Ilagan, the Secretary-General of RI Global. “Many women who have been marginalized and discriminated against don’t realize they have rights to access aides and supplies. Instead, they are stereotyped as weak and unable to decide for themselves, when women

with disabilities are the experts in their own care.”

Among the conclusions the experts developed was one in particular: advocacy groups can “no longer work in silos” regarding the care of disabled women refugees. “We need to build bridges between humanitarian actors and disabled people’s organizations on the ground,” said Georgia Dominik of the International Disability Alliance. They also determined that:

- Collecting data disaggregated by age, gender and disability, and analyzing such data so that the rights and needs of persons with disabilities are addressed in humanitarian response was a first priority.

- Sensitizing all international and national humanitarian staff, and local and national authorities on the rights, protection, and safety of persons with disabilities would strengthen their capacity and skills to identify and include persons with disabilities in humanitarian preparedness and response mechanisms.
- Promoting meaningful involvement of persons with disabilities, especially women, and their representative organizations in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of preparedness and response programs would help insure appropriate coordination mechanisms.

RI Global will continue its work with women with disabilities, which it began in earnest with the Shanta Memorial Rehabilitation Centre (SMRC) in 2007. Through Building the Capacity of Women with Disabilities in India, RI Global aimed at generating economic empowerment through vocational training and microenterprise, and to promote the right to health and basic health care practices among women with disabilities.

THE 43rd WORLD CONGRESS



Nearly 32 years ago, the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD) was not even on the agenda of the United Nations and the U.S. had not come close to creating an American with Disabilities Act (ADA). But as Rehabilitation International (RI Global) gathered for its 15th World Congress in Lisbon, Portugal, President Harry S. Fang expressed hope for large-scale change in the coming decades. He had reason. RI Global had published its Charter for the 80s in seven languages to great acclaim; the UN had used it as a blueprint for its World Program of Action for the Decade of Disabled Persons; and countless countries had looked to that framework as the basis for their national programs.

Since then, RI Global has convened eight World Congresses and helped push for the ADA, which just celebrated 25 years, and the CRPD, which just finished 10 years on the UN books. Following the wishes of Fang, RI Global has also spent the past few years developing a “more effective structure for the harmonization of international cooperation in our field.” Although, as Fang – one of the most active RI Global presidents – put it, “each organization that is working for international cooperation... has its own reasons for doing so, has its own priorities and has its own method of work.” RI Global has, for 94 years, tried to coordinate those rhymes and reasons and brought the movement forward.

From 21-27 October, RI Global, its partners, affiliates and friends will once again meet in Edinburgh, Scotland for a promising Congress on topics ranging from Return to Work to independent living. With more than 750 influential disability experts already registered from 58 countries, Lots has changed in RI Global’s third generation of existence, as reflected in the Presidential greetings from the Governor of Hong Kong and the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic in the back of the 1984 World Congress program, but even Ronald Reagan, then president of the United States, noted that “the progress we have made is a tribute to the courage and determination of our disabled people.”