

Visit report - Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

April 6th, 2019
AC Marriott Hotel
Montreal, QC

Attendees list:

Prof. Denise Keiko Shikako Thomas
Prof. Nandini Ramanujam
Prof. Jonas-Sébastien Beaudry
Prof. Sébastien Jodoin
Eunice Leyva García
Elisabeth Beauchamp
Melissa Moor
Sharon Webb
Eunice Leyva Garcia
Elisabeth Beauchamp
Sharon Webb
Miriam Gonzales
Roberta Cardoso
Mathieu Simard

Introduction

Ms. Catalina Devandas Aguilar (Costa Rica) took office as the first Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on 1 December 2014, following Human Rights Council resolution 35/6 establishing the new special procedures mandate.

The creation of this mandate recalls the universality, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelatedness of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and the need for persons with disabilities to be guaranteed the full enjoyment of these rights and freedoms without discrimination.

It signals that further attention is needed to address the barriers that persons with disabilities continue to face in all parts of the world in their participation as equal members of society.

With this new mandate the UN system continues to strengthen its efforts to recognize, promote, implement and monitor the rights of persons with disabilities from a human rights-based approach, in line with the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the broader human rights framework.

Mandate of the Special Rapporteur

The Special Rapporteur is mandated to:

- Develop a regular dialogue with States and other stakeholders for the identification, exchange and promotion of good practices related to the realization of the rights of persons with disabilities;
- Receive and exchange information and communications on violations of the rights of persons with disabilities;
- Consult with and involve persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in a participatory manner in the conduct of her work;
- Make concrete recommendations on how to better promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities, including on how to promote development that is inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities;
- Provide technical assistance in support of national efforts for the effective realization of the rights of persons with disabilities;
- Raise awareness of the rights of persons with disabilities;

- Closely cooperate with other UN human rights mechanisms and UN entities to advance the rights of persons with disabilities in a coherent manner;
- Integrate a gender perspective throughout the work of the mandate;
- Report annually to the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly.

In the discharge of these functions, the Special Rapporteur conducts country visits upon the invitation of the Government, to examine the state of protection of the human rights of persons with disabilities in the given country. The Special Rapporteur submits a report of the visit to the Human Rights Council, presenting her findings, conclusions and recommendations.

Canada: UN expert on disability rights visit

The UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, Catalina Devandas-Aguilar, conducted an official visit to Canada from 2 to 12 April 2019 to assess the situation of people with disabilities.

Devandas-Aguilar travelled to Ottawa, Toronto, Montreal, Fredericton and Halifax. During her visit to Montreal, an afternoon meeting was planned by Dr. Keiko Shikako-Thomas and a distinct list of researchers working on rights of children with disabilities, access to justice, inclusion and dignity from McGill University, as well as law students, disability rights advocates and parents of children with disabilities.

The purpose of the meeting in Montréal was for attendees to contribute to the Special Rapporteur's work by sharing their perspectives and to learn more about the Special Rapporteur's work priority areas. The information shared during this meeting will be used to inform Special Rapporteur report on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in Canada.

A range of topics were discussed including but not limited to accessibility, social protection, independent living in the community, education and healthcare. These are all topics of major interest and concern to the Special Rapporteur.

Testimonials from attendees:

From: Mathieu (parent)

“It was a very productive meeting on April 6th with the Special Rapporteur on Persons with Disabilities, Ms. Catalina Devandas Aguilar. It was an opportunity to exchange with McGill researchers during her country visit to Canada, in order to provide data to strengthen her capacity to report on the situation of persons with disabilities in the country. The exchanges were diverse and rich in content. Among topics of discussion raised were the question of access to services and the situation of persons with disabilities in rural areas. The intersection of indigenous and refugees identities with disability and their compounded impact on lived experiences was also evoked. The recommendations that will emerge from her report will serve as a tool to the government and civil society actors, aiming to improve disability policies and practices in Canada. We, McGill researchers and students, are proud to be part of this new trend to use evidence-based data to feed United Nations human rights systems in order to inform policy change at the national and international level.”

From: Helene (parent)

“When I set out to document my experience coming to terms with my daughter's stroke, I hoped it might be helpful to other families. More generally, I also hoped it might somehow become part of a broader conversation on how outcomes could be improved for children with brain-based disabilities. In this context, the opportunity to be part of the Child-Bright Network has been very meaningful to me. The recent meeting with Ms. Devandas, UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, which I had the privilege of attending, was a concrete example of how effective the partnership between parents and researchers can be.

Particularly, in communicating the realities facing many children with disabilities, with a view to contributing to improved outcomes in the future.”

From: Miriam (postdoctoral fellow)

“ ...as a postdoctoral fellow doing research on stakeholder engagement in research, this meeting gave me the opportunity to: (1) meet the SR, other McGill researchers, and relevant stakeholders, (2) see first-hand the SR’s emphasis on hearing and including the voices of all relevant actors, (3) and see how meetings such as this one give civil society (stakeholders, researchers) the opportunity to provide their input, voice their concerns, and potentially influence outcomes for the group of interest, in this case, children with disabilities in Canada.”

Meeting with the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

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From: Mathieu Simard

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From: Helene

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From: Miriam Gonzalez PhD., MSc., BA (Hns)

The UN Special Rapporteur (SR) on the rights of persons with disabilities, Ms Catalina Devandas Aguilar, held an individual meeting with McGill researchers, lawyers, trainees, and parents of children with disabilities on Saturday April 06, 2019 in Montréal, Québec. The SR was visiting Montréal and had visited Ottawa and Toronto as part of her visit to Canada to gather information about Canada's progress on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

The purpose of the meeting in Montréal was for attendees to contribute to the SR's work by sharing their perspectives and to learn more about the SR's work priority areas (socioeconomic

inclusion, the promotion of full citizenship of persons with disabilities, and embracing diversity). In return, the SR would: (1) hear from civil society about the situation of persons with disabilities in Canada, (2) learn about researchers' work on disability research, (3) connect with Canadian researchers willing to collaborate and provide research evidence in relation to all areas of her work, and (4) obtain useful information for her report on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in Canada.

As a postdoctoral fellow doing research on stakeholder engagement in research, this meeting gave me the opportunity to: (1) meet the SR, other McGill researchers, and relevant stakeholders, (2) see first-hand the SR's emphasis on hearing and including the voices of all relevant actors, (3) and see how meetings such as this one give civil society (stakeholders, researchers) the opportunity to provide their input, voice their concerns, and potentially influence outcomes for the group of interest, in this case, children with disabilities in Canada.