

Prof. Matsubara, Prof. Tateiwa, Prof Nagase, distinguished participants and ladies and gentlemen. It is my great pleasure to say a few words as a vice-chair of the CRPD at this auspicious opening of the webinar on the COVID-19 and persons with disabilities in East Asia as the East Asia Disability Studies Forum 2020. I thank co-chairs of this important Forum, Prof. Tateiwa and Prof. Nagase of the Institute of Ars Vivendi as well as all the colleagues from East Asia and beyond for giving me this precious opportunity.

On May 8th 2020, the CRPD expressed its grave concern at the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on persons with disabilities. The COVID-19 pandemic highlights that protection, response and recovery efforts will not be effective unless everyone is included. Critical and urgent action is required to ensure that those most at risk, including persons with disabilities are explicitly included in response and recovery efforts. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities outlines the normative legal standards to address discrimination and inequality, and these standards need to be integral to COVID-19 protection, response and recovery measures. A human rights approach is critical to response and recovery efforts not only in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, but also to ensure that States take action now to build equitable, and sustainable societies that have the mechanisms to prevent and respond rapidly to future public health emergencies.

In-person sessions of the human rights treaty bodies including CRPD were canceled because of the COVID-19 pandemic since this March. However, we believe that high priority should be placed on the human rights treaty bodies being able to resume their vital work as soon as possible. As travel restrictions currently vary so greatly, we do not think it is reasonable to work on the assumption that no sessions can be held in Geneva until it is possible for all members to be physically present. That may be the case for many months. Other international bodies, including within the United Nations family, are increasingly meeting in mixed mode combining in-person and online participation. We believe that such options should be explored for human rights treaty bodies meetings in the latter part of 2020.

In closing, I hope this seminar will bring fruitful outcome. Thank you very much.