

Intervention by Abdi Omar at the General Debate at the Conference of State Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Personal with Disabilities

On behalf of the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists as part of the wider International Communication Project

Conference of State Parties President Salovaara, Distinguished Committee Members and Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

My name is Abdi Omar and I have Cerebral palsy. Because of my condition, I have a communication disability.

I communicate using an augmentative and alternative communication device (AAC / a communication aid) – this is my voice!

Communication is a human right - and while disabilities create many barriers in life, the ability to communicate, to be heard, to speak for yourself - should not be one. Without my voice, I would not be where I am in life today.

There are millions of people with communication disabilities that cannot express themselves – people who find it hard to ask a question, name an object, or even ask for help. Some people struggle to hear, read or understand what it being said to them.

I am not saying everyone needs a high-tech communication device, but I am calling on you to make them accessible to all. Everyone should have a communication method that they are comfortable with, that allows them to speak their mind, to have a voice.

Inclusive communication methods should not just be optional but necessary for governments to adopt and to encourage across the services that we are dependent upon – to give people with communication disabilities parity, to give them equality with people who do not experience such disabilities.

And while systemic change is necessary, the professional support we need from speech and language therapy and access to speech and language therapists and others, is also vital. These professions need to be encouraged and developed.

As a person with a communication disability, I am grateful for my voice because it has allowed me to discover who Abdi Omar is!

It has given me autonomy, it has given equity and it has given me the ability to explore my passions just as anybody without a disability can.

We have a lot of work to do to create a better world for disabled people, especially in the developing countries. The changes I am calling for may be much easier to implement for upper middle and high income countries, yet we still find resistance.

In low, and lower middle income countries such changes would be significant – and I talk from my own experiences as a person of Somali origin, with lived experience that has travelled extensively.

For too long have people with disabilities, including those with communication disabilities struggled. For too long have we been ignored by employers - and economic opportunities denied to us. For too long have we been unable to access the services we need to live good and prosperous lives.

We want independence and we want equality. And only through access to communication technologies and aids, inclusive communication approaches and professional support such as speech and language therapy - as part of all efforts to implement the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, can we work to achieve those ambitions.