

# The launch of

WHO Global initiative on  
health equity for persons  
with disabilities

**10 June 2025 | 11.30 - 12.45 EDT**

Official side event of the Conference of  
States Parties to the CRPD (United  
Nations, New York)



## About the speakers

(in alphabetical order)



### **Ola Abualghaib //**

**Director, United Nations The Global Disability Fund**

Dr. Ola Abualghaib is Director of the United Nations Global Disability Fund (GDF) (formerly UNPRPD). Since 2019, Ola has led the GDF Secretariat, developing its Strategic Operational Framework 2020-2025 and 2025-2030, positioning the Fund as a key global partner advancing disability inclusion, and leading the rebrand of the Fund. Since its inception in 2012, the Fund has reached over 800 million persons with disabilities in over 100 countries.

Ola has more than twenty years of experience working on gender and disability in development, including in fragile and crisis-affected settings in the Arab States, Africa and Asia. Before joining GDF, she was the Director for Global Influencing and Research at Leonard Cheshire Disability in London, UK. Over the past 15 years, she has also worked with the UN system worldwide to promote disability-inclusive policies and programmes. Ola served as the Vice Chair of the International Disability and Development Consortium (IDDC) and a board member of the Disability Rights Funds. Ola holds a PhD in Social Protection from the University of East Anglia, UK. Ola was featured in the Gender Equality Top 100 list of most influential people in global policy.



## **Darryl Barrett //**

**Technical Lead, Disability Programme, World Health Organization Headquarters, Switzerland**

Darryl Barrett is a health and legal professional with 25 years' experience in service delivery, public policy, regulatory reform and programme development. He has over 14 years' experience advising governments and civil society in more than 30 countries across the Middle East, Asia, and the Pacific. This has included living and working in fragile and conflict-affected states, middle-income and well-resourced settings. Darryl currently leads the disability programme at the World Health Organization Headquarters in Geneva. He is responsible for managing the development and coordination of guidance, advocacy, and capacity building on disability inclusion in the health sector among Member States and global partners. Prior to this, he worked at the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific, working on disability and rehabilitation, and on health law and ethics. Darryl has managed programmes that specifically address a range of health-related legal, governance and service delivery priorities of governments, with a focus on addressing the exclusion of marginalised populations. He has also led processes to strengthen the engagement and participation of health service users, particularly persons with disabilities. Having worked with a range of large entities including United Nations, federal and state agencies for health, law and human rights, and international development organizations, Darryl has experience in addressing the political and practical challenges of delivering results in large and complex organizations.



## **Jarrod Clyne //**

**Deputy Executive Director, International Disability Alliance**

Jarrod Clyne is the Deputy Executive Director at the International Disability Alliance, where he has worked for 5 years after a 15-year career at the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Jarrod has a particular interest in mental health and the rights of persons with psychosocial disabilities.



## **David Duncan //**

**Athlete and Chairman, Global Athlete Leadership Council, Special Olympics**

David Duncan is a Special Olympics athlete from Jamaica. He currently serves as Chairman of the Global Athlete Leadership Council (GALC) and the GALC liaison to Special Olympics International's Health department. The GALC is one of the ways in which athletes, who are persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities, participate in setting the strategies and providing substantive governance to the Special Olympics movement. David has been involved in Special Olympics since 2008 and participates in volleyball, basketball, football, and track and field. David is employed with Special Olympics Jamaica as an IT and support staff. When David isn't working or competing, he enjoys watching movies, playing sports, and engaging in debates with his friends, as well as learning new things.



## **Malin Ekman-Aldén //**

### **Director-General, Swedish Agency for Participation, Sweden**

Malin Ekman-Aldén holds the position of Director General of the Swedish Agency for Participation since 1 February 2017. She was previously working in the Government Offices (Regeringskansliet) for several years, specializing in issues related to persons with disabilities and the care of the elderly. She also has a background working in civil society organizations with development cooperation within these fields, both nationally and internationally. During the period 1994-2008 she was Secretary General for the Swedish Organisation of Disabled Persons International Aid Association (SHIA). On several occasions she has been head of delegation or appointed expert at human rights conferences, expert meetings and international dialogues. She was also a member of the board of International Disability and Development Consortium (IDDC) for a number of years. Ms Ekman Aldén was appointed as a Special Investigator of the Government Committee tasked with strengthening interpreting services with a focus on equality and participation during 2020-2022.



## **Lubna Jaffery //**

### **Minister of Culture and Equality, Norway**

Ms. Lubna Jaffery (born 1980) is a Norwegian politician affiliated with the Labour Party. Serving as the Minister of Culture and Equality since 2023, she has been a significant figure in Norwegian politics. Jaffery's political journey began in local government, where she served on the Bergen city council and the Fjell municipal council. In 2019, she assumed the role of Bergen City Commissioner for Labour, Social Affairs and Housing before transitioning to become a deputy member of the Storting (the Norwegian Parliament) in 2009. Throughout her parliamentary career, she has played a pivotal role, notably as a member of the Standing Committee on Scrutiny and Constitutional Affairs and as the First Vice Chair. She continues to advocate for inclusive policies and initiatives that uplift local communities and address societal challenges.

Jaffery has a master's degree in administration and organization theory from the University of Bergen (UiB) from 2007. At the same university, she has undergraduate and intermediate subjects in comparative politics. She also has a degree from UiB in public law and basic studies in sociology. Before Jaffery was appointed political adviser in the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion in the Stoltenberg II government in 2008, she worked as an adviser at the research institute SINTEF. Since stepping down as State Secretary in the Ministry of Culture in 2012, she has worked as a special adviser in the employers' association Spekter, adviser in the communications agency Geelmuyden Kiese, communications manager at the transport company Tide, and senior adviser in the Directorate of Integration and Diversity.



## **Hannah Loryman //**

### **Co-chair, IDDC UN Task Group, International Disability and Development Consortium**

Hannah Loryman is the Head of Policy at Sightsavers where she leads a team influencing policy on health, education, and disability rights, and the co-chair of the International Disability and Development Consortium's UN Task Group. Prior to joining Sightsavers, she worked on disability and health policy at CBM and at the UK Department for International Development, and on a range of other policy issues within social society. She is a trustee for Able Child and the UK Forum for International Education and Training and is currently undertaking a Doctorate in public policy.



## **Werner Obermeyer //**

### **Director, WHO Office for the United Nations, New York, USA**

Werner Obermeyer is Director of the World Health Organization (WHO) Office at the United Nations in New York, which represents the Office of the Director General. He oversees the promotion of health in the General Assembly and other inter-governmental bodies and processes, WHO's relations in the UN system entities based in New York, as well as non-governmental organizations that focus on public health.

He was responsible for the negotiations which culminated in adoption of the 2011, 2014 and 2018 Political Declarations on the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases, the 2016 and 2024 Political Declarations on Anti-Microbial Resistance, the 2018 and 2023 Political Declarations on Tuberculosis, the 2019 and 2023 Political Declarations on Universal Health Coverage, the 2022 Political Declaration on Road Safety and 2023 Political Declaration on Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response.

He is responsible for engagement with the Executive Office of the Secretary General, Presidents of the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council, and the diplomatic community. The work of the WHO Office at the United Nations includes a focus on the sustainable development agenda, global health and foreign policy, universal health coverage, health security and social protection, road safety, health emergencies, communicable and noncommunicable diseases, climate change and health, disabilities, narcotics and drugs, mental health and disabilities. Prior to joining the World Health Organization, he was the representative of the UN Environment Program (UNEP) in New York, responsible for environmental governance, health determinants and sustainable development. Before joining the United Nations, he served in the South African Foreign Service, holding various senior diplomatic assignments.





## **Dirk Platzen //**

**Director, Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion Section, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia**

Dr Dirk Platzen is an Australian diplomat with an extensive track record working in academia and the Australian public service. Following work at universities in Germany and a PhD and work in Australia as an environmental scientist, Mr Platzen joined the Australian development agency AusAID in 2011. He has worked on climate change projects across East Asia and the Pacific, with a focus on REDD+ in Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, monitoring and evaluation across the South and West Asian development program before joining the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet to support Papua New Guinea's hosting of the 2018 APEC summit. He returned to the department of Foreign Affairs and Trade as delegate to the G20 Development and Trade and Investment working groups. He has been DAC delegate at the Australian delegation to the OECD from 2021 to 2025 and is currently working as Director for multilateral gender equality, disability and inclusion.



## **Michael Schloms //**

**Head, Unit for Human Rights, Disability Inclusion and Media, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, Germany**

Michael Schloms studied political science in Berlin and Paris. He entered the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) in 2005 where he worked on the cooperation with Central America, the Ministry's organisational and IT development and on European development policy (at Germany's Permanent Representation in Brussels). Since 2022, Mr Schloms is Head of BMZ's Unit "Human Rights, Disability Inclusion, Media".



## **Bonnielin Swenor //**

**Director, Disability Health Research Center, Johns Hopkins University, USA**

Dr Bonnielin Swenor is an epidemiologist and disability health researcher whose work bridges science and policy to advance health equity for people with disabilities. She is the inaugural Endowed Professor of Disability Health and Justice at Johns Hopkins University and is the founding director of the Johns Hopkins Disability Health Research Center, which uses data-driven approaches to shift the paradigm from 'living with a disability' to 'thriving with a disability'. Drawing on both her research and lived experience with disability, Dr Swenor's work focuses on creating more inclusive health systems, advancing disability representation in data and policy, and ensuring disabled people benefit from research and succeed in STEM careers. She has advised government agencies and policymakers on strategies to make systems more inclusive and played key roles in efforts to improve disability data collection, build inclusive research practices, and expand access to health care and education for people with disabilities.