

African Disability Forum, Arab Organization of Persons with Disabilities, ASEAN Disability Forum, Down Syndrome International, European Disability Forum, Inclusion International, International Federation of Hard of Hearing People, International Federation for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus, Latin American Network of Non-Governmental Organizations of Persons with Disabilities and their Families, Pacific Disability Forum, World Blind Union, World Federation of the Deaf, World Federation of the DeafBlind, World Network of Users and Survivors of Psychiatry



International Disability Alliance
150 route de Ferney, PO Box 2100
CH 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland
+41 22 788 42 73

205 East 42nd Street, 20th floor
New York, NY 10017, USA
+1 6467760822

chair@ida-secretariat.org
www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org

**Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General:
Cc. Dr. Zsuzsanna Jakab, Dr. Michael J. Ryan, Dr. Alarcos CIEZA
World Health Organisation, Geneva**

Monday 27 April 2020

Your Excellency Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus,

On behalf of the [International Disability Alliance](#) and the [International Disability and Development Consortium](#), we want to express our deepest appreciation for the significant efforts by the World Health Organization to fulfil inclusion of persons with disabilities in the response to the COVID-19 global pandemic. In particular, we appreciate the launch of the Disability Considerations During the Covid-19 Outbreak, and your prompt response to our previous letter about discrimination in provision of urgent medical care to persons with disabilities.

We are writing to request your immediate action in order to address the dearth of accessibility of the information shared by the World Health Organization on the COVID-19 response. Many persons with disabilities, including deaf and hard of hearing persons, blind and partially-sighted persons, persons with deafblindness, and persons with intellectual disabilities are not able to access the vital information being shared by the World Health Organization through public briefings, social media, web-pages and other channels because the information is not provided in accessible formats or alternative modes of communication.

We believe that your action in this regard will significantly contribute in ultimate success of the global efforts to control the pandemic as roughly 15 per cent of the world population will have the information to actively participate in protecting themselves and others. We also believe that ensuring equal access to information and communication as recognized in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and reemphasized in the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy launched in 2019, would create a strong example for all member States, UN agencies and other actors to take effective steps toward accessibility and inclusion.

Accordingly, we request you to:

- Take immediate action to ensure that public briefings and webinars delivered by the World Health Organization, on the COVID-19 pandemic are accessible to all. This must include using radio channels to reach out to people in the most remote areas, providing captioning, International Sign interpretation, plain language and

good pace while avoiding technical terms and acronyms without providing proper explanation;

- Take immediate action to ensure that digital communications including the webpages and social media channels of the World Health Organization are accessible for all persons with disabilities by complying with the W3C [WCAG 2.1 standard](#) (Level A and AA) and by sharing accessible word formats and accessible [ePub](#) and PDFs rather than scanned versions of the material;
- Take all appropriate measures to ensure that all regional and country offices of the World Health Organization are committed to information and communication accessibility. This includes ensuring that all staff, including the communication, web-management and public engagement teams are informed of and act to comply with the above-mentioned accessibility requirements in particular with regard to information and communication essential for the COVID-19 response and recovery.
- Use all appropriate means to urge other actors including Member States to immediately ensure access to essential covid-19 information and adopt a time-bound plan to make all public information and communication accessible for all persons with disabilities.

We thank you very much for your consistent support and commitment to the human rights of persons with disabilities and remain at your disposal for any support we can provide to address this critical issue.

Sincerely,



**Ana Lucia Arellano
Chair, International Disability
Alliance**



**Dominic Haslam
Chair, International Disability and
Development Consortium**

IDA Member Organizations

African Disability Forum, Arab Organization of Persons with Disabilities, ASEAN Disability Forum Down Syndrome International, European Disability Forum, Inclusion International, International Federation of Hard of Hearing People, International Federation for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus, Latin American Network of Non-Governmental Organizations of Persons with Disabilities and their Families, Pacific Disability Forum, World Blind Union, World Federation of the Deaf, World Federation of the DeafBlind, World Network of Users and Survivors of Psychiatry