CONCEPT NOTE

Sierra Leone’s Ministry of Social Welfare presents…
Unlimited! A Show of Talent of Persons with Disabilities
Inclusion for all, especially women and girls

Main sponsor: GOVERNMENT OF SIERRA LEONE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL WLEFARE
Co-sponsors: Missions to the United Nations of Australia, Brazil, Chile, Republic of Croatia, Greece, Georgia, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Portugal, Sri Lanka, Zambia
UN Agency: UN Women, DESA
Civil society: Give Them A Hand Foundation, United African Congress, International Association of Applied Psychology, World Citizens Network, the Psychology Coalition of NGOs

Wednesday, 12 June 2024      1–3PM EST
UNHQ Plaza, UN headquarters NYC

BACKGROUND
Disability refers to a broad spectrum of neurodevelopmental conditions in which individuals may suffer from personal, interpersonal, behavioral and social challenges. Statistics show that the number of persons with disabilities worldwide is startling and also increasing. An estimated 1 in 6 persons -- 1.3 billion people -- experience significant disability. The number of people with disabilities is increasing, partly due to simultaneous increases in chronic health conditions and aging populations. These persons face many health problems (diabetes, stroke, obesity), social problems, stigma, discrimination and poverty, as well as inequities in education and employment, and barriers in access to the health system and needed services.

Yet, persons with disabilities also possess many character strengths as well as abilities and skills in fields like expressive arts.

OVERVIEW
This event is intended to highlight those skills, by featuring persons with disabilities themselves, as well as the commitments and projects of UN Member States, UN agencies, and civil society organizations. Performances will include a fashion show, musical and dance, and other artistic expressions. Also, products produced by persons with disabilities will be on display in a tent on the premises.

Background of Government Commitment and the Case of the Main Sponsor, Sierra Leone
As a member of the international community, Sierra Leone has aligned and complied with International Human Rights Instruments, including ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), among others. Several treaty instruments have been domesticated as a practical manifestation of Sierra Leone’s unwavering commitment to promote and protect the rights of women and children. These include the Gender Justice Laws of Domestic Violence Act, Devolution of Estate and Property Act and Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act and the Child Rights Act.
A major breakthrough in the lives of persons with disabilities was the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) by the United Nations in 2006. The ratification of this treaty instrument in 2009 and its subsequent domestication in the form of the Persons with Disability Act, 2011 -- currently under review by the Government of Sierra Leone – speaks volumes to the nation’s increased efforts in advancing the rights of persons with disabilities at all levels of national development.

Since the establishment of global engagement processes such as the Conference of States Parties to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities with its concomitant call to track progress made and remaining challenges in its implementation, Sierra Leone has been an active participant. This participation is in compliance with Article 40 (1) of the Convention which provides that ‘States Parties shall meet regularly to discuss any matter relating to the Convention’. These Conferences serve as the principal policymaking body for the formulation of policies and development of programmes for the advancement of the rights of persons with disabilities, and provide the platform for reporting on the disability situation in countries.

UN member States, civil society organizations and private sector companies have all contributed to highlight the skills and products produced by persons with disabilities that address this Convention, including at the United Nations. Sierra Leone’s participation at the UN has included delivering statements, taking part in roundtable discussions, and co-sponsoring side events. These have included at the 2019 Conference entitled “Reaching Higher Standards of Health and Well-Being through Cultural Engagement, Empowerment, and Inclusion”, with WHO and the Mission of Norway and various NGOs, as well as a side event in the 16th Session of Conference of States Parties to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in June 2023.

The present event builds on the success of the 2019 event, where a person with disabilities displayed his talent, leading to the motivation to expand this on a grander scale, available to a larger number of the UN audience. The present event is meant to provide ample opportunity for persons with disabilities to showcase their talents and skills, in a first-ever special event, to be held at the UN Plaza, a large venue accessible and available to all.

The special event will provide a valuable platform to showcase the strides of co-sponsors and Sierra Leone in implementing the Convention, particularly in displaying talents and artistic and cultural skills and products of persons with disabilities. The intended displays, performances and fashion show will be interspersed with remarks/speeches by advocates and representatives. For Sierra Leone, these include the Minister of Social Welfare, the Permanent Representative to the UN, representatives of the disability community and others.

Sierra Leone has made impressive progress in developing socio-economic empowerment programmes for persons with disabilities, including a revised system for disability assessment and determination. With the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Multi-Partners Trust Fund, multi-stakeholders committees have been set up to generate referrals and linkages in addressing disability-related issues.

Given that various organizations of persons with disabilities actively involved in arts and music will showcase their talents on this occasion, those in Sierra Leone include: Great Walpoleans, Disabled Artists Union, Milton Margai School for the Blind Musical Group.

**OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of the proposed special event include to:

- Showcase efforts to improve the artistic and cultural potentials of persons with disabilities within a disability-inclusive society
- Foster awareness and discussion about the socio-economic empowerment programmes for effective contribution of persons with disabilities to the development of communities.
- Engage representatives of other States Parties and relevant global partners for knowledge-sharing, capacity-building, networking and exploring actionable options on the socio-economic empowerment programme for persons with disabilities as well as funding opportunities.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES/DELIVERABLES
Expected outcomes of this proposed special event include:
- Member States, other stakeholders and public awareness of artistic and cultural skills of persons with disabilities, specifically the reality of ability, not inability or disability
- Member States enlightened by experience shared on the status of disability rights in Sierra Leone
- Experiences and lessons shared on how the socio-economic empowerment programme works and how it can contribute to nation-building
- Funding opportunities explored and subsequently attracted to facilitate the successful rollout and implementation of the socio-economic empowerment programme for persons with disabilities
- Partnerships at the International stage built and strengthened for effective and efficient service delivery to persons with disabilities
- Capacity of service providers strengthened about improvement of processes and systems leading to the success of the socio-economic empowerment programme