

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

Let me express my gratitude to UN Habitat for the opportunity to participate in this World Cities Day, and most importantly, for the agenda, where the focus is on community issues.

The covid-19 pandemic has put the whole world before the task of providing medical care to patients, preventing the spread of infection, and combating its consequences. The situation with covid-19 has identified and made even more prominent issues such as access to information, services, infrastructure for various groups of the population. Economic problems have become even more acute and in many ways have become a catalyst for social tension in many communities.

I represent here the community of persons with disabilities, in particular women with disabilities in Central Asia. I often say: wherever it is convenient for a woman with a disability, it is convenient for everyone - women without disabilities, men with disabilities, the elderly, the whole society.

Questions of people with disabilities often become a mirror of all processes taking place in society as a whole. And the questions of people with disabilities living in cities, migrating to cities, reflect how our cities are ready to become a natural and comfortable environment where a person with a disability can exercise their human rights.

The main word for this is the word "participation". Participation for us is access to infrastructure, and this applies not only to medical facilities and social protection facilities. This is participation in city life, in all its manifestations.

This is access to information. And if before the situation with covid-19, we talked, for example, about the information available in public transport for people with hearing and vision impairments, access to information on the streets of cities. Now we are talking about access to information on the prevention of covid-19, which, unfortunately, was not adapted to the special needs of citizens with disabilities.

It was such organizations as the Shyrak Association of Women with Disabilities that initiated the creation of special videos on measures to prevent covid for persons with disabilities. These videos used animation for the mentally impaired, and were also translated into sign language for the hearing impaired, audio recording for the visually impaired, and subtitles.

The whole world is rapidly switching to digital communication. And this is the reality of today's situation. But many people with disabilities do not have

enough knowledge and skills, as well as special devices and access to the Internet, in order not to be left behind.

This has particularly affected not only the community of persons with disabilities, but also other communities when providing financial, economic and other support to governments during isolation and quarantine measures. To get help, you had to use various electronic platforms for submitting applications, and many people were unable to take advantage of this opportunity.

To solve this problem, many organizations of people with disabilities provided assistance in working with Internet portals. In order to protect themselves and their assistants, face shields were made and distributed to social workers and sign language interpreters. One again it was initiative of Community but not of our municipality.

During the period of quarantine measures, the situation with domestic violence was especially aggravated. This was facilitated by both forced isolation and the worsening economic situation in families. It was especially difficult in those families where children and adults with mental disabilities live. Online counseling, flexible isolation measures would help such families at this point.

It was a major challenge for victims of domestic violence to seek help, get it and break the cycle of violence. For women with disabilities, unfortunately, the lack of special city services and ignorance of special needs has become a big problem. We demand that crisis centers and shelters that were not available before COVID-19 must accommodate these special needs.

Support for people with disabilities and representatives of other communities is primarily support for the families in which they live. Thus, by creating a comfortable urban environment for them, we help members of the whole family, which means a larger number of citizens.

It must be said that the new situation, oddly enough, has its advantages. So, we see numerous examples of popular volunteering, when people gather help groups for sick covid, help for groups of people who find themselves in difficult life situations.

Billboards of the city of Almaty, my city, depict the faces of doctors who are at the forefront of fighting in covid-19. This is an initiative of the citizens, and I think that such a movement should be supported in order for it to become an urban culture even outside the crisis time.

The COVID-19 pandemic has clearly demonstrated the role of community work in making cities resilient and functional. And thank UN Habitat one again for raising this topic.

Thank you very much for your attention.