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A Message to COP 27

“Disabled people are expert adapters – we spend our lives figuring out how to live and thrive in a world which was not designed for us. If anyone is well-placed to figure out what a climate-friendly future where we also get to thrive looks like, it's us, disabled people.” *Áine Kelly-Costello blind and chronically ill storyteller, and campaigner for disability and climate justice.*

“Greta Thunberg is an Autistic woman who shows how Disabled people can be great climate change leaders. In Greta’s words, our impairments allow us to ‘think outside the box’. *Bristol Disability Equality Forum.*

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) there are currently **more than 1 billion** disabled people in the world. That is a great number of people who will feel the effects of global warming harder than anyone else and who currently have no visible input into the discussions on the subject.

If you locate one of the few places disabled people are mentioned at all in the 3675 pages of a recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report, the world's most authoritative panel on climate change, the mention will be fleeting, and usually hiding in the middle of a list of so-called “vulnerable groups.” This is not acceptable and is dismissive of over one billion Disabled people around the world.

Disabled people are currently excluded from discussions and solutions on climate change, meaning that laws, policies, and programmes don’t consider the needs of Disabled people or the impact of proposed change. This is referred to as “Eco-ableism”

“Eco-ableism” will only end when decision makers listen to and work with Disabled people, enabling us to directly share our views and experiences and to input into discussions and co-create solutions to climate change.

Climate change threatens the lives and existence of Disabled people. We are deeply concerned about global warming and the absence of Disabled people from decision making for the following reasons:

1. Disaster Planning and Climate Impacts.

Disabled people are frequently unable to evacuate their homes and reach safety, in the event of evacuation due to extreme weather, leading to the loss of many lives. [Disabled people are twice as likely as any other group to die in disasters](#). Support networks may not be able to reach us, shelters may be inaccessible and early warning systems may not alert Disabled people due to communications being inaccessible. Research shows that planning, preparedness, response, and recovery efforts often overlook the needs and perspectives of Disabled people. We often require different types of support in terms of access to food, shelter, and transportation.

Disabled people experience barriers in our everyday lives, we have homes that are not built for our needs, inadequate incomes to meet the extra costs of disability, insufficient support to maintain dignity and independence, and inaccessible services, transport, information, and environments. These existing barriers must be considered when developing and executing evacuation plans. Hurricane Katrina was found to have disproportionately impacted 155,000 Disabled people including those with visual impairments, mobility impairments and learning disabilities. In the Grenfell Tower fire bad access and lack of evacuation plans led to over 40% of **Disabled residents losing their lives**.

Rising temperatures, especially heatwaves are a major concern for Disabled people. For instance, visually impaired people who would normally use guide dogs to get around are suddenly unable to do so. Pavements become too hot for guide dogs to walk upon restricting navigation and movement. Another casualty of heatwaves are people with Multiple Sclerosis, of which there are 130,000 in the UK. Since this condition prevents messages from the brain and spinal cord from reaching other parts of the body, the MS Society has reported that people have experienced fatigue, muscle spasms, and changes to vision as heat increases. Medications that Disabled people rely on to manage their conditions can also interact negatively with the heat.

2. Pandemics and increased global disability.

The COVID-19 pandemic was a catastrophe for Disabled people, showing how pandemics can rip through a community. [Two out of every three victims of Covid-19 had a disability](#).

History shows that pandemics strike Disabled individuals harder than anyone else due to long term health conditions including weakened immune systems, unequal access to health care, inadequate incomes and support, barriers to accessing food, transport and services and inaccessible communications. Covid-19 is believed to be the first of many Pandemics which will sweep across the Globe. Millions of people now have long Covid, increasing the numbers of Disabled people in the community. Environmental illnesses of many kinds are on the rise.

Environmental Pollution is a major cause of ill health: impairing children's health, diminishing their capacity to learn, and reducing their life chances.

3. Environmental solutions that Exclude.

We are witnessing massive changes to the way we live. Electric vehicles are becoming the cars of choice and over the next decade will be the only type of car that can be purchased. This raises issues of affordability and accessibility. Cars are being banned from streets, to minimise air pollution, resulting in some city centres becoming no-go areas for some Disabled citizens. Charging points for electric vehicles are being built that are unusable by Disabled drivers and create obstacles for Disabled pedestrians. Household boilers are set to change, raising issues of affordability and accessibility. The banning of plastic straws, with no consideration of those Disabled people who are reliant on them, exemplifies the failure to develop inclusive environmental solutions.

4. Exclusion from climate financing.

Organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) have a crucial role to play in all aspects of climate response planning, implementation, and evaluation. They need to be funded to do that work. Climate mitigation and adaptation financing must both mainstream the inclusion of disabled people as well as ensure targeted funding is available. It is critical that capacity-building for disabled people and their representative organisations for both disaster preparedness and inputting into climate adaptation measures is available and designed in conjunction with OPDs.

In addition, loss and damage discussions and pledges must recognise the impact of both economic and [non-economic](#) losses on disabled people, from loss of livelihood to worsened health and mobility, and starkest of all loss of life.

Decades of exclusion from climate discussions must end. We, as a collective of global and informed Disabled climate activists ask that:

- 1.** Disabled people must be involved in all debates and in shaping solutions, beginning with our full participation in COP. Representatives from the global Disabled community must be at the table when environmental solutions are being developed and implemented, to prevent societal barriers to our inclusion increasing rather than reducing.
- 2.** The needs of Disabled people must be addressed in climate change discussions and all environmental solutions must be designed to be accessible for us all.



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3. All COP, political and climate events must be designed to be accessible to Disabled participants and the wider global community, considering all aspects of accessibility including sign language interpreters and access for wheelchair users and others with mobility and sensory impairments. There should be an option to join debates virtually.
4. Cop should have a specific focus on excluded communities / all future conferences must include specific programme content addressing the needs of excluded communities
5. Work to meet Sustainable Development Goals must address inclusive environmental planning

An important mantra of Disabled people is "Nothing about us without us." It is vital that Disabled people are part of the world-wide work to address climate change and develop solutions for an inclusive and sustainable world.

We look forward to the self-representation and participation of Disabled people at COP events.

Signed by:

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