



RIGHTS & INCLUSION
AUSTRALIA

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)

By email: disability.equity@dfat.gov.au

15 December 2023

To whom it may concern,

Re: Input to the International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy

Rights & Inclusion Australia (R&IA) is a national Disability Representative Organisation (DRO) promoting the rights and inclusion of people with disability. Founding members of the organisation were involved in the development of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and R&IA has remained associated with the international movement of people with disability through our acceptance into the Pacific Disability Forum in 2020. Our main areas of focus in Australia are the built environment, accessible housing and achieving equity of inclusion for First Nations people with disability.

R&IA welcomes the development of the International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy (the Strategy) and supports the involvement of Australian organisations, including Disability Representative Organisations (DROs) in the drafting and decision-making about what the final Strategy will address. Given our focus on housing and the built environment we recommend that the strategy include practical ways in which the Australian International Aid effort, including the funding and policy assistance that is provided by DFAT, prioritise the requirement for accessibility in all new and significantly renovated infrastructure which is built using international aid funds; and strongly advocate for accessibility guidelines to be adopted when building and renovating housing.

Accessible Infrastructure

R&IA developed under contract to the Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) a set of Guidelines and Standards for accessibility in public infrastructure, which it delivered in June 2022 following consultation with stakeholders which included CBM Australia and the Pacific Region Infrastructure Facility (PRIF). It is our understanding that these draft documents are yet to be presented to the Board of the PDF, as the secretariat wants to have them co-endorsed by the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat (PIFS).

R&IA is very much aware of the work that has to be done subsequent to the development and endorsement of such guidelines and standards, including their adoption within the legal and regulatory frameworks which govern developing and

building projects. As a member of PDF we are very keen to be involved in the negotiation, promulgation and implementation of the documents in the region, which we see as the next stage.

R&IA's approach is to work alongside Organisations of People with Disability (OPDs) and to assist in building capacity. There is significant technical expertise required to effectively advocate for and oversight implementation and evaluation of accessibility standards in housing and public infrastructure, and there would be benefit to DFAT funding a transfer of these skills as part of its commitment to building the capability of OPDs to manage and implement these reforms

- 1. R&IA recommends that standards for accessibility be applied as requirements to all funding for housing and infrastructure provided as part of international aid.**
- 2. R&IA recommends that DFAT, on occasion and where appropriate, advocate for progressing discussions and negotiations in specific countries and across regions which can result in legal and regulatory outcomes that favour the inclusion of people with disability – and specifically to assist in the progression of the consideration of the accessibility guidelines and standards which have been developed for implementation in the Pacific Region.**
- 3. R&IA recommends that DFAT continue to fund capacity-building of overseas OPDs and develops a capability to transfer skills relevant to the implementation of accessibility in housing and public infrastructure.**

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

R&IA is strongly supportive of the SDGs, to which Australia is a signatory, as a mechanism to hold governments worldwide to account for ensuring that economic development is environmentally sustainable and done in a manner which does not further disadvantage vulnerable populations, including people with disability. R&IA believes that currently Australia does not adequately acknowledge or value the potential role that the SDGs, in association with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, can play in framing the goals of inclusion that we are clearly not meeting (as outlined in the recent report from the Disability Royal Commission and the NDIS Review Report). Some of the key measures of inclusion which can be identified by specific SDGs, are not being met here in Australia, and the current thinking that the SDGs relate only to Australia International Aid program, is short-sighted at best and condescending at worst. At the end of 2023 there is a greater emphasis in Australian Government reforms on human rights as needing to underpin the delivery of services to people in vulnerable groups (cf the [Exposure Draft of the Aged Care Act](#)), and this can and should be strengthened by a stronger relationship between projected outcomes in these reforms and existing conventions and treaties that Australia is already a signatory to.

Goal 11 of the Sustainable Development Goals focuses on sustainable cities and communities, and highlights accessibility as a feature which will ensure people in vulnerable populations are not left behind. The Strategy has the potential to elevate the

SDGs as a key set of measurable KPIs for Australia to achieve (within the current timeframes set for the SDGs), both in domestic and foreign policy.

- 1. R&IA recommends that DFAT incorporate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as key measurable outcomes of inclusion within the Strategy.**
- 2. R&IA recommends that DFAT specifically references Goal 11 of the SDGs to underpin its requirement for accessibility in funded international infrastructure projects.**
- 3. R&IA recommends that the SDGs are used to identify measurements of wellness and inclusion of people with disability in Australia.**

We appreciate the opportunity to make submission on this important Strategy and look forward to working with DFAT in its implementation.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Bleasdale". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Michael Bleasdale
Executive Officer, Rights& Inclusion Australia