DATE: 31 March 2020

A/TO: The Honourable Ronald Sackville AO QC
      Chair
      Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse,
      Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability

FAX: N/A

TEL: +61 7 3734 1900

E-MAIL: Ronald.Sackville@royalcommission.gov.au (cc: un.geneva@dfat.gov.au)

DE/FROM: Beatriz Balbin
      Chief
      Special Procedures Branch

FAX: +41 22 917 90 08

TEL: +41 22 917 98 67

E-MAIL: sr.disability@ohchr.org

REF:

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OBJET/SUBJECT: Letter from the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, Mrs. Catalina Devandas-Aguilar.
The Honourable Ronald Sackville AO QC,

I have the honour to address you in my capacity as Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 35/6.

I am writing to express my appreciation for the comprehensive, timely and important statement about the impact of COVID-19 on persons with disabilities in Australia issued by the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability on 26 March 2020. I fully subscribe to the call for action, and noted with appreciation the references to my mandate’s recommendations in the statement.

The COVID-19 pandemic is impacting dramatically on persons with disabilities across the world, as they are at higher risk of when contracting the virus. This situation is further aggravated by existing structural barriers, discrimination and lack of adequate support services for persons with disabilities. The mandate of the Royal Commission to inquire into how to prevent and better protect persons with disabilities from experiencing violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation in all settings and contexts is pivotal to ensure that Australians with disabilities enjoy their rights on an equal basis with Australians without disabilities during and after the current crisis.

Building inclusive societies for all requires joint efforts now more than ever. In this context, in-depth analysis of how the human rights-based approach to disability informs all policy responses for persons with disabilities is of utmost importance. Over the past five years, my mandate has developed guidance for States and other actors on how to operationalize the principles and provisions of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the human rights-based approach to disability.

I would like to inform you that I am at your disposal to share information and good practices on how discussions about the rights of persons with disabilities are evolving at the international level, and I stand ready to engage by phone or other means during this critical time.
Should you wish to contact me, please write to Ms. Cristina Michels, Human Rights Officer supporting my mandate at the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva (cmichels@ohchr.org, sr.disability@ohchr.org).

Please accept, the Honourable Ronald Sackville AO QC, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Catalina Devandas-Aguilar
Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities