“[T]he international community is calling for a global effort to make physical environments, transportation and information accessible to everyone and to change attitudes that fuel stigmatization and discrimination ... in order to realize an inclusive society where everyone’s rights are protected and equal opportunities are supported.”

John W. Ashe, President of the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly on the International Day for Persons with Disabilities, 3 December 2013

More than 1 billion people, or 15 per cent of the world population, are living with disabilities. In 2013, UNOG made considerable progress towards making the Palais des Nations more accessible to all delegates, staff members and visitors, and enabling participation in meetings. UNOG has made accessibility an integral part of the Strategic Heritage Plan (see Special Focus: Towards a greener, more sustainable UNOG) and has taken concrete measures to enhance the accessibility of the premises.

The efforts of UNOG, together with the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the expertise of OHCHR, are clear immediately upon arriving at the main entrance, where a special priority lane is available for those who need it. The transformation of the historic building does not stop at the door. When entering the premises, persons with disabilities are provided with a map of the 153,468 square-metre Palais des Nations. The map highlights all accessible doors, elevators, restrooms and facilities, greatly facilitating movement, as does larger and widespread signage throughout the building. Nearly half of the elevators in the Palais are fully accessible, 11 of which have Braille numbering and six of which announce the floors in French and English.
SPECIAL FOCUS

In addition, UNOG continues efforts to make conferences accessible, providing real-time captioning for some meetings, hearing loops, sign language interpretation, webcasting and Braille documentation made in the UNOG Braille production centre. Permanent reserved seating will soon be available in the Human Rights and Alliance of Civilizations Room (Room XX), while several stages, podiums and interpreter booths have already been made fully accessible. Upon request, mobile mini-elevators, access ramps and priority parking are also provided.

In line with the Secretary-General’s report on disability in the post-2015 development agenda “The way forward: a disability-inclusive development agenda towards 2015 and beyond”, UNOG will continue to raise staff awareness on accessibility to create a more inclusive environment and incorporate accessibility in service provision, as well as consult and collaborate with other Geneva-based international organizations on best accessibility practices.