

# United States International Council on Disabilities



March 9, 2026

Permanent Mission of Kenya to the United Nations  
866 UN Plaza, Suite 304  
New York, NY 10017

## Via Electronic Correspondence

Dear Judge Phoebe Okowa:

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The U.S. International Council on Disability (USICD) is an international NGO working to advance international disability rights and inclusive development and to build bridges among the U.S. and foreign governments, disability and human rights communities, and the private sector through strategic advocacy, convening, training, and education. USICD also hosts the Youth Advisory Council (YAC). The YAC is a dynamic platform for emerging leaders with disabilities aged 18-30 who are passionate about global disability rights inclusion and implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Several provisions of the CRPD recognize the right to self-determination; equal opportunity to work; and justice – all issues which the ICJ considers throughout its case load. With that in mind, the YAC respectfully submits the below questions to all ICJ nominees to better understand how they would ensure disability inclusion, accommodations, and accessibility within the ICJ:

- 1. Many cases before the ICJ will impact people with disabilities. For example, the ICJ's most recent case that recognizes the obligation to protect the environment under international law. However, disabled persons organizations rarely submit amicus briefs or are included in petitioner briefs to the Court. How can the ICJ better include disabled persons organizations throughout the Court's proceedings?**
- 2. The ICJ has faced criticism in the past for its staff primarily coming from higher education institutions considered "elite"**

**Isabel Hodge**  
*Executive Director*

# United States International Council on Disabilities

**universities<sup>1</sup> that may not be available to all students due to costs or institutional barriers. Students with disabilities also may have difficulty attending these universities due to lack of accommodations, stigma, and other institutional barriers specific to disabled students. If elected to the ICJ, how will you ensure the ICJ diversifies its staff to include qualified individuals from more representational universities?**

- 3. If elected as an ICJ Justice how will you ensure your staff feel comfortable discussing accommodations in the workplace with you?**
- 4. If elected as an ICJ Justice how will you ensure ICJ proceedings are inclusive and accessible for those who are deaf or use sign language?**

We thank you for your time and consideration of these questions. We respectfully request a response by **April 23, 2026**. Please contact [ashira.s.vantrees@gmail.com](mailto:ashira.s.vantrees@gmail.com) if you have any questions or clarifications.

Sincerely,



Isabel Hodge  
Executive Director  
United States International  
Council on Disabilities

Ashira Vantrees  
2025-2026 YAC Member

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<sup>1</sup> Of the 275 ICJ Fellows that have participated in the program since its inception in 2001, 151 were from universities within the United States of America. The remaining fellows represented universities from the following countries: 22 from the United Kingdom, 24 from Canada, 19 from Switzerland, 10 from Australia, 10 from France, 10 from The Netherlands, 7 from China, 5 from Singapore, 2 from Germany, 2 from India, 2 from Spain, 1 from a Brazil, 1 from a Colombia, 1 from Eritrea, 1 from Iran, 1 from Kenya, 1 from Palestine, 1 from the Phillipines, 1 from the Republic of Congo; 1 from South Africa, 1 from Tunisia; and 1 from Turkey. While Fellows' regional representation was more diverse, the universities they've derived from raises serious questions regarding equity and accessibility to these opportunities.