Statement to the agenda item 11.6 “Health, environment and climate change” of the 72nd World Health Assembly from 20–28 May 2019

The International Society of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine (ISPRM), the International Spinal Cord Society (ISCOS) and the International Association of Logopedics and Phoniatrics (IALP) strongly supports the Strategic priority matters on Health, Environment and Climate Change and advocates for further research in these areas.

The issues of weather extremes that are increasing in prevalence also include floods and extreme cold causing health issues with the most vulnerable including persons with disabilities, chronic illness, and the elderly.

Rehabilitation professionals care for the health needs of persons with disabilities. These individuals are most vulnerable to the impacts of pollution and climate change due to respiratory disorders, inability to tolerate extreme heat and cold, vulnerability to infectious disorders, difficulties with self-care and mobility and difficulty with evacuation and finding emergency shelters.

People with disabilities need a system of priority attention in cases of emergencies, as well as permanent access to basic technologies such as cell phones and clean off-the-grid energy so life saving devices such as ventilators and wheelchairs can be reliably available.

Primary prevention must include roadways with defined space for walking and wheelchair use and sustainable development must include the full integration of persons with disabilities in all decision making strategies to maximize social welfare and ensuring people to sustain their abilities.

We urge WHO and member states to:

1. To explicitly acknowledge the need to include persons with disabilities as a vulnerable group.
2. To work specifically on how to integrate the needs of persons with disabilities within the planning of the care of emergencies and disasters with respect to accessibility, clean reliable power, health care consultations, supplies and equipment and also take them into account in the future planning for sustainability.
3. To advocate for research on how to develop sustainable techniques to care for people with disabilities.