**Oral submission of Ms. Aditi Verma, President of Self Advocates’ Association of India**

I am Aditi Verma, 26 years old, a Down syndrome Girl whose journey of life started with difference from all other children of my age. I am representing Self Advocates Association of India. We have over 900 members with intellectual disability and autism from all over India. I got elected in 2019 for three years.

As a Down syndrome girl means lot of limitations and late mile stones in life. I had gone through Open Heart Surgery at the age of 2 years 6 months. Yes!! After surgery, things started getting better for me, I started walking. But I had no friends.

My school journey also did not start very well; my teacher did not take me seriously. My parent realised my situation and took me to special school, from here things started. I started learning the basics of academics.

When my father shifted to Navi Mumbai; here I joined a special school Swami Brahmanand Pratishthan.

This is the place where I grew up, learned my language, my Arithmetic, participated in sports, dramatics and dance.

After completing my Vocational training, I started going to my father’s office and learned data entry, but did not enjoy it much. I always wanted to do something of my own and show to everyone that I can do it. I always use to watch the chaiwala (Tea Vendors) coming to our offices and serve tea. This gave us idea of Aditi’s Corner. My parents and my younger brother Aman gifted me Aditi Corner on 1st Jan 2016.

Everything was running well, then COVID 19 pandemic started and on 22nd Mar’2020 and lockdown was announced. I also had to close my Café.

Initially I did not realize what this mean but later I felt that all my business stopped but we have to pay at least some amount my two staff and café rent. This was very stressful period. Once I thought to close everything but could not take this decision, as for me My Café is everything, the dream which I have seen for so many years, so I do not want to surrender in front of situation and circumstances.

After relaxation in lockdown, on 15th Sep’2020 we restarted our Café. Our client offices also started opening and we also started picking up.

But, our plans to expand further stopped, as I always want

Aditi’s Corner to become a platform, where I can support other children, who are Special persons and not getting opportunity to come out and show his or her capabilities. Either they get Job opportunity or do something of their own.

During this period of Pandemic I realized that getting JOB and especially for Special persons is a big challenge. First we have to make ourselves Job worthy and secondly there should be job opening for us.

Yes, there is increase in awareness about Special Children, social stigma has reduced but still society look at us in sympathy and do not take us seriously. This is also a big issue in getting proper job.

One more point come to my mind that the issue start from home, even today parent feel shy to take kids out with them.

I have attend many workshops on Rights of Persons with disability act which came in 2016 and UN CRPD which came earlier. But I still find people look down upon us and do not consider us worthy of doing job. That is why the employment opportunities are very less for us. This need to be changed

There is also question of security and safety for girls. The reasonable accommodation for us is a mentor who should be a friend and guide available when required. We also require larger private business to keep a quota of job. They should use part of their CSR for training us on the job in their premises for giving us feel of job.

And most of all when we do equal work we should also get equal pay like others. There should be no discrimination at work. But we should be allowed to consult our mentor for guidance if required.