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**Statement by Catalina DEVANDAS-AGUILAR**

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Ms. President,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen

With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development a year ago, Member States made a historical commitment to humanity: a commitment to end poverty and reduce inequalities, a commitment to achieve peace, cooperation, and prosperity shared by all. A commitment to “leave no one behind” in the path of development.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This commitment will not be met without ending the grave marginalization faced by persons with disabilities.

Today, I would like to remind you that millions of peoples around the world are excluded from the benefits of development and cannot enjoy their human rights because of their disabilities. And that we need to take concrete measures to ensure that the promise of a shared future reaches them too.

As persons with disabilities we are subject to great inequalities. We are more likely to experience poverty and suffer malnutrition. We have fewer chances of obtaining a job, receive education or access basic public services, such as safe drinking water, sanitation, housing and transportation. Moreover, we are more likely to be victims of violence, in all its manifestations, and to contract HIV/AIDS.

In addition, many of the distinct groups that form part of the collective of persons with disabilities - such as the deafblind, autistic persons or persons with albinism - face heightened levels of discrimination and serious barriers to access to social protection or essential services, such as education or health.

A vast majority of persons with disabilities is systematically set aside and this abandonment is detrimental to society as a whole. The cost of exclusion is very high, not only for persons with disabilities and their families, but also for national economies and our shared prosperity. It is estimated that their lack of participation in the labor market can amount up to between one and seven percent of the gross domestic product of a country. We are talking about billions of dollars that are lost worldwide.

Ms. President,

In this context, the question we must ask ourselves is: how to translate these goals into concrete policies and actions for the benefit of those with disabilities?

Inclusive development is essential to achieve the full participation of all people. We need to ensure that development equally benefits us and as a means not only to improve the capacities, opportunities and accomplishments of each person, but also more generally to create more inclusive, equitable and sustainable societies.

This requires viewing persons with disabilities from a human rights perspective, rather than as recipients of paternalistic measures or of charity. That is why the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted ten years ago, is the best instrument to guarantee the necessary conditions and support for our collective to participate in all development processes and outcomes.

According to the Convention, we need to consider disability-related issues in all public policies and programmes, and ensure that persons with disabilities participate in their design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

While seemingly obvious, this is far from being the case today; and to do this would represent a major paradigm shift in the approach towards persons with disabilities, both from a human rights perspective, and from a development one. This would mean abandoning the medical and charitable approaches, and adopting a human rights-based approach where persons with disabilities would be considered as rights-holders rather than mere recipients of protection, rehabilitation and wellbeing.

There are several elements to be considered in the implementation of disability-inclusive policies. The report that I am presenting today seeks to draw the attention of States on four issues that are critical for the formulation and implementation of any policy.

**First of all, the existence of an anti-discrimination framework that prohibits all forms of discrimination on the basis of disability.**

States must adopt solid anti-discrimination legal frameworks that prohibit all forms of discrimination on the basis of disability and guarantee equal and effective legal protection to all persons with disabilities against discrimination on any grounds, including the denial of reasonable accommodation.

I encourage you to think about the following questions:

1. Is discrimination on the basis of disability expressly prohibited in our countries?

2. Is the obligation to provide reasonable accommodation explicitly recognized in every area?

3. Are there accessible and effective remedies for victims of discrimination?

4. Are there policies that focus on the multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination that face persons with disabilities, such as being a women with disabilities or an indigenous person with disabilities?

From my mandate, I have placed special emphasis on the situation of women and indigenous persons with disabilities, in order to draw the attention of States and of the United Nations system on the urgent need to take measures to address the distinct forms of discrimination that they face.

**A second key element to ensure disability-inclusive policies is accessibility.**

Accessibility is a basic requisite for persons with disabilities to be able to access and enjoy all programmes and services, and to participate fully and independently in society.

Without access to the physical environment, transportation, information and communications, persons with disabilities cannot exercise their rights, participate in development programmes and policies nor benefit from them.

Therefore, States must also have solid policy frameworks in the area of accessibility that include strategies and action plans with specific timelines to make public and private facilities and services accessible to **all** persons with disabilities.

I invite you once more to think about the following four questions:

1. Are there legal obligations in our countries that require making the physical environment, transportation, information and communications accessible?

2. Are there adequate standards in our countries to guide the accessible design of the environment and services?

3. Do we have a plan to measure progress in the area of accessibility?

4. Are there simple and effective remedies to address the lack of accessibility both in public and private spaces?

I would like to highlight that the compliance with accessibility norms and standards is a global concern. The contributions received for this report illustrated that the degree of compliance of policies and programmes about accessibility is very low all over the world.

**A third element necessary for the implementation of disability-inclusive policies is the availability and provision of support services and devices.**

Sometimes it is insufficient to have a strong anti-discrimination framework, or accessible environments and services. Some persons with disabilities may require different forms of assistance and support to live and fully participate in their communities.

I’m referring to devices such as wheelchairs, prostheses, hearing aids, braille devices, communication boards or screen readers, as well as service animals, personal assistants, support for decision-making, and other types of support that many people need to live independently.

The availability and provision of support services and devices is essential to ensure that many persons with disabilities, especially the poorest, can fully access the programmes and policies on an equal basis with others. Moreover, for many persons with disabilities, access to these goods and services is a prerequisite to live a dignified life and to fully enjoy all the human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Regrettably, in many developing countries only some five to 15 percent of those in need of assistive technologies and devices can access them. And the access to services such as personal assistance is almost impossible.

Let’s ask ourselves:

1. Do our countries have policies and programmes that effectively guarantee free access to devices and assistive technologies for all persons with disabilities, including those living in rural and remote areas?

2. Are there services for personal assistance? Support services in the area of communication? Support services for decision-making?

3. Do mainstream services, such as education, employment or justice, envisage the provision of assistance and support services? Because, as you know, children with disabilities may need additional support in schools, and some persons with intellectual disabilities may need a coach to gain employment.

4. And generally, are services provided with a community-based approach to ensure the participation of persons with disabilities?

Distinguished delegates,

If we respond positively to the questions that I have been raising, I assure you that we will have come a long way in ensuring inclusive development.

Because if we ensure that there is no discrimination against persons with disabilities in public policies and programmes, that the environment and services are accessible, and that people receive the support services and devices they may require, we will have ensured that the specific demands and needs of persons with disabilities are taken into account.

Obviously, to advance in any of these three areas it is necessary that we also become more systematic in the collection of statistical information, which enables to inform the development of policies, to follow-up on their implementation as well as the progress made. I commend the efforts of the United Nations Statistics Division, the Washington Group on Disability Statistics and of other agencies such as UNICEF, UNFPA, ILO, or WHO, to ensure that statistical information can be disaggregated by disability and be compared internationally, to enable us to measure progress in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals with regards to persons with disabilities.

**Finally, I would like to close this statement with the fourth fundamental issue: we must guarantee that development processes are participatory.**

Structural barriers that cause the exclusion and poverty of persons with disabilities cannot be overcome without their direct participation. It is persons with disabilities who know best what barriers they face in their own contexts, and how these affect their lives.

It is essential to fully include persons with disabilities in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all policies and programnes. My Mandate has developed a thematic study for the Human Rights Council on the rights of persons with disabilities to participate in decision-making. The report contains specific guidance on how to ensure the effective and active participation of persons with disabilities in the design and implementation of public policies.

Distinguished delegates,

A few years ago, many of the questions that I raised today had no answer. But today we have the experience and information needed to ensure that no one will be left behind in development.

Times are changing ... No more excuses. Nothing without persons with disabilities!

Thank you.