Human Rights Council
Social Forum
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EU Intervention

Mr Chair-Person,

An estimated one billion people across the globe have a disability. Persons with disabilities are often the poorest in any community and face many barriers to enjoying their human rights. This means that fulfilment and enjoyment of rights by persons with disabilities is crucial for the achievement of a truly sustainable development. When world leaders were adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in New York last year, 25th September, they gave a pledge that "no one will be left behind". This has been a strong signal of the inclusive and comprehensive approach that underpins the new Agenda, including the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The EU was active and vocal in ensuring that the inequalities suffered by persons with disabilities are properly addressed in the new global framework. Therefore we are happy that the needs and interests of persons with disabilities have been explicitly recognised in the 2030 Agenda and are a cross-cutting issue in the SDGs.

The EU is home to approximately 80 million of persons with disabilities (every 6th European). The multiannual European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 is the basis for the policies on the rights of persons with disabilities within the EU. This Strategy seeks to implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) to which the EU became a party in January 2011. The strategy underscores that disability is a rights issue and not a matter of discretion.
The same principles apply to our external action. The European Disability Strategy and the Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy reflect the EU’s strong commitment to advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities in the world.

In the last five years, the EU has supported the social inclusion and human rights of persons with disabilities through development cooperation programmes with some 314 projects in over 85 countries.

With the Human Rights Action Plan 2015-2019, the EU decided to further step up the promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities in EU external action, through mainstreaming as well as through targeted actions to remove barriers to their equal participation and their social inclusion.

This year we will also celebrate the 10 anniversary of the adoption of the CRPD. Today almost 160 UN Member States have ratified the convention. Many of them are developing countries. Development cooperation has an important role to play in order to support the efforts from Governments and to strengthen and empower disabled persons organisations, so that they can participate in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and so that they can fully perform their monitoring role.

The Convention has often been described as "a human rights instrument and a development tool", and it should guide our way towards attaining the Sustainable Development Goals. Both are mutually reinforcing.

Ensuring that no one is left behind, which was the main theme of the High-level political forum of July 2016, means that we need to put in place inclusive mechanisms that build on the existing political will and structures, in order to avoid duplication and enhance efficiency. We think that these mechanisms should at least include aspect of participation of person with disabilities - along the mantra “Nothing about us -without us”; secondly reflect the need to develop and promote disability - disaggregated data aligning the Agenda 2030 targets with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and thirdly to embrace the diversity of persons with disabilities.
We still have a long way to go, but I can assure you that the EU stands ready to work with you so that we all, by 2030, can say that persons with disabilities were not left behind.

"While the EU continues to have significant concerns regarding the Social Forum itself, namely a lack of inclusive dialogue during negotiations over its mandate over the years and the duplication of its focus with many existing mechanisms and therefore the unnecessary costs involved, we would like to add our voice on this year's theme as the EU attaches great importance to the issue of rights of persons with disabilities, especially in the context of sustainable development."

Thank you.