Good morning, I would like to start by thanking the High Commissioner and our other opening panelists as well as the organizers of the Social Forum. The United States warmly welcomes this year’s topic, focusing on the human rights of persons with disabilities. Twenty-three years ago, the United States became the first country in the world to adopt national civil rights legislation banning discrimination against disabled people. Since that time, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) has had a profound impact both at home and abroad. Here in the United States, the ADA, in tandem with other disability legislation, has led to the inclusion of disabled people in all areas of life. Internationally, the ADA has long been regarded as the gold standard for disability rights.

We commend the ongoing work of New Zealand and Mexico on their resolution on this topic, noting the very timely focus on Article 11 of the CRPD and the situation of persons with disabilities in situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies during the March 2106 session. As we all know, the international community’s approach to promoting the rights of persons with disabilities is a two-pronged approach: taking disability-specific measures as well as mainstreaming disability rights into the broader international human rights movement. We are pleased
to see the increased consideration of language related to persons with disabilities in other HRC resolutions, but believe that more could be done. The Czech resolution on political participation at this most recent HRC session marks a good example of such inclusion, as it references access to political and public life for persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities should be included in the same manner as other historically marginalized and vulnerable groups throughout the HRC and its special procedures, and we hope that we will all continue working harder to achieve this.

My colleague Judith Heumann, the Special Advisor for International Disability Rights in the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor at the State Department, will be speaking to you all via video later this week on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the 2030 agenda.

Thank you all for your efforts on this forum, and we look forward to continuing to engage on this important issue.