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**Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

**23rd session**

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**Opening Statement by**

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**Representative of the Secretary-General**

Mr Chair,

Distinguished members of the Committee,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the United Nations Secretary-General and the High Commissioner for Human Rights, it is an honour for me to open your virtual twenty-third session, the first remote session for the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

I echo the words of the High Commissioner to the treaty body Chairs, who stated in the online informal meeting of Chairs held this past June, that she acknowledged the extraordinary work accomplished by the treaty bodies during the COVID-19 crisis to implement their mandates to the maximum extent possible by working remotely despite significant challenges. I take this opportunity to recognize your unyielding commitment to upholding human rights. You have demonstrated how treaty bodies can advance their crucial work through creative working methods despite the trials of the Covid-19 crisis. Just as the pandemic was unfolding, under the leadership of your Chair, you held your 13th pre-sessional working group remotely this past March, adopting list of issues for six countries and one list of issues prior to reporting. I congratulate you for this successful outcome, which led the way for other treaty bodies to shift to online meetings, as an exceptional measure, and carry out the work of the pre-sessional working group remotely.

Mr. Chair, Committee members,

As reiterated in your statements on persons with disabilities and Covid-19, the current situation has starkly exposed the heightened vulnerability and risks to persons with disabilities, underpinned by entrenched discrimination and inequality. I understand that part of your work at the present session will focus on the rights of persons with disabilities arising in the context of COVID-19 and the elaboration of appropriate responses. I commend you for this.

Distinguished members,

Please allow me to mention a few important developments regarding the rights of Persons with Disabilities within the United Nations System and at the intergovernmental level.

During its 44th Human Rights Council session the Council adopted resolutions extending the mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities and on the Elimination of discrimination against persons affected by leprosy and their family members for a further period of three years.

In addition, OHCHR is currently drafting its next report to the Human Rights Council, on physical activity and sports. I encourage the Committee to devote attention to this matter and the specific actions needed to break the structural discrimination against persons with disabilities, particularly women and girls, in mainstream recreational and leisure physical activity.

In other developments carried out by OHCHR, the Bridging the Gap project on human rights indicators for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is coming to an end and we expect to have a complete set of tools to distribute by the end of the year, including the indicators, policy and data sources guidelines, and training materials.

The United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities brought together nine United Nations entities to work collaboratively on supporting disability inclusive Covid-19 response and recovery at the national level. OHCHR will contribute by collecting good practices and evaluating impact in countries with a specific focus on economic, social and cultural rights.

Distinguished members,

Allow me now to refer to the review of the human rights treaty body system. The 2020 review of the treaty body system was launched on 2 June by the co-facilitators of the process, the Permanent Representatives of Morocco and Switzerland to the United Nations in New York, appointed by the President of the General Assembly, the Permanent Representative of Nigeria. The High Commissioner, Mme. Bachelet, attended the launch and highlighted the opportunity of using the treaty body review to draw on the many proposals already put forward, including by the Chairs themselves in their vision agreed at their meeting in 2019. She also highlighted the need for better digital tools to strengthen the accessibility of treaty bodies, including for persons with disabilities. The High Commissioner stated that the COVID-19 pandemic presented an opportunity to rethink and expand working methods to have more impact and visibility on the ground, while addressing the need for language interpretation and other technical challenges of working online.

In another development, the 32nd Meeting of Chairs took place virtually at the end of July this year, continuing the discussion on the 2020 review of the treaty body system. They stressed that in this time of unprecedented global crisis, the need to uphold human rights is greater than ever. The Chairs called on States and the Secretary-General to fully support the work of human rights treaty bodies and to enable them to exercise their mandates to the maximum extent possible in the coming months. The Chairs also highlighted the need to uphold human rights and the work of treaty bodies in the face of the current UN budgetary crisis, calling on States to ensure the necessary resourcing of the system also in the longer term through the 2020 treaty body review process.

The Chairs had fruitful exchanges with the Co-facilitators of the General Assembly’s 2020 Review of the Human Rights Treaty Body system, regarding potential strengthening of the existing treaty bodies’ mechanism to continue to adequately protect and promote the rights of persons in situations of vulnerability worldwide. Building on their vision for the treaty body review, agreed in June 2019, the Chairs also submitted a written contribution on strengthening the treaty body system. Their proposals included establishing predictable schedules of reviews, greater coordination between committees, dialogues in the regions, and calling for the formula, which forecasts resource requirements to cover the prospective or planned work of treaty bodies, and all mandated activities, including those that are specific to some Committees. The Chairs also called for an evaluation of the current needs and challenges of digital technology, including on compensation, and more generally, accessibility and reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities.

The Chairs also discussed the Covid-19 contingency strategy with the Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, Nada Al-Nashif, and the challenges currently facing treaty bodies to fully discharge their mandate in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, the Chairs recalled that the Committees have continued to work through online sessions since March 2020. The Chairs noted that virtual work was, however, a temporary solution highlighting that they looked forward to resuming their work in plenary face-to-face sessions as soon possible.

In the meantime, the Chairs decided that the Covid-19 Working Group of treaty body members should continue to pursue its work, focusing on the practical impact of Covid-19 on the enjoyment of human rights. I believe that the Chair as well as Ms. Kayess, who represent the Committee on the working group, will update you in further detail.

Distinguished members,

Due to the health risks and travel restrictions related to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, OHCHR in coordination with the United Nations Office at Geneva, has announced that physical meetings requiring the travel of participants will be suspended until the end of the summer, in the Northern Hemisphere. The pandemic continues to persist with a possibility of a second wave of COVID-19 during the second half of the year. As it cannot be predicted how the situation will evolve, the treaty bodies have to be prepared for all possible scenarios, including the worst-case scenario that no more in-person meetings can be convened this year.

In addition, the current liquidity crisis facing the United Nations is likely to exacerbate this situation. The persistent late and underpayment of assessed contributions has reached the stage where the continuation of activities is being disrupted by the lack of resources. In this regard, I wish to warmly thank you for your genuine commitment to keep the treaty body system functioning in order to avoid a protection gap in the enjoyment of rights by all. The pandemic should not paralyze the treaty body system when it is needed most.

As is the case for all treaty bodies, the quality of the work of CRPD is rooted in the quality of its membership. Later this year, the States parties to the Convention are due to elect new CRPD members to replace those whose mandate will end on 31 December 2020. As this will be your last session this year I would like in particular to salute those members whose terms are coming to an end.

Dear Members, you have a busy agenda ahead of you, all the more challenging given that you are working in different time zones, spanning 17 hours. I sincerely appreciate the flexibility and receptiveness you have demonstrated in these exceptional circumstances. During your session, you will discuss and adopt crucial recommendations and decisions on individual communications, working methods, and follow-up to concluding observations. You will also continue the work of the Task Force on the draft general comment on article 27, as well as discussions in relation to the consequences of COVID-19 on the enjoyment of the rights of persons with disabilities.

I extend my best wishes to all of you for a successful and productive online session.

Thank you.