

Observance of the 2019 International Day of Persons with Disabilities

**REMARKS BY H.E. TIJJANI MUHAMMAD-BANDE,
PRESIDENT OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On this very special day, I would like to extend my greetings to the more than 1 billion persons with disabilities across the globe.

Since 1992, the UN set aside every third day of December to focus attention on disability issues around the world.

Over the years, this initiative has grown in content and dimension. We are very grateful to civil society, and, organizations working for the rights of persons with disabilities. Your tireless work has led to stronger commitments and more progressive policies. Your leadership led to the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006. You are continuing to raise awareness and to keep us accountable. I know, there is so much more to be done if we are going to honor our commitments and achieve full implementation of the Convention, as well as Agenda 2030.

The theme for the International Day this year is, “Promoting the Participation of Persons with Disabilities and their Leadership: Taking Action on the 2030 Development Agenda”.

I find this a very fitting topic. The theme prioritizes inclusivity through the removal of physical, technological and attitudinal barriers for persons with disabilities. It aligns with the core pledge of Agenda 2030 to “leave no one behind.”

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals requires mainstreaming disability issues, as integral parts of sustainable development.

In furtherance of the above, and as part of the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the United Nations established a Steering Committee on Accessibility (SCA) at the 73rd session. I am pleased with the contributions and initiatives of this Committee towards improving the accessibility of United Nations premises, conferences and meetings, and communications.

In view of this, I have the honor to announce the re-appointment of H.E. Walton Alfonso Webson, Permanent Representative of Antigua and Barbuda, and H. E. Park Chull-joo, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea, as Co-Chairs of the Steering Committee on Accessibility (SCA) at the United Nations for the duration of the 74th Session. I thank them for the exceptional job they are doing for all of us.

I encourage them to further engage with civil society organizations for persons with disabilities, Member States, departments of the UN Secretariat, and to improve accessibility to the United Nations.

The General Assembly is leading in this direction with its resolution 73/341 requesting the Secretary-General to submit a comprehensive report during the 74th Session, on the ways to improve the accessibility of the United Nations Headquarters premises for persons with disabilities. In line with this resolution, the Secretary General launched the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy in June 2019.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

One of the main issues to be discussed here today is the issue of sport as a veritable tool for inclusion of persons with disabilities. We must recognize sports as enablers and means of empowerment for persons with disabilities as they are for everyone.

I encourage Member States, the private sector and civil society organizations to use sports as a medium to promote the dignity of all people.

I would love to see our para-sports heroes given equal visibility and recognition as we extend to other athletes.

I equally want to see persons with disabilities playing major roles and excelling in the media, entertainment, politics, academia and any vocation they choose.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The principle of inclusion is a cardinal pillar of my Presidency of the General Assembly.

I am convinced that, if we maintain focus and engagement, the prejudice and marginalization suffered by persons with disabilities will come to an end sooner than later.

I am confident that with the joint efforts by the international community guided by the leadership of persons with disabilities, we will accomplish disability-inclusive development and achieve empowerment, inclusiveness and equality for all.

I call on all Member-States to ratify and implement the Convention along with full implementation of Agenda 2030 in order to promote the participation and leadership of persons with disabilities in all endeavours.

I thank you for listening and have a great day.

