

- Good morning everyone. My name is Kartik, and am a young disability activist, an SG young leader, co-founder at I-Stem, an organization where we empower youth with disabilities using technology, community and support services, and a software engineer at Microsoft.
- As other speakers have highlighted, Covid-19 has had a profound impact on people with disabilities, leading to unequal access to educational, employment and healthcare access. Youth with disabilities, over 200 million of them around the world with nearly 80% living in the developing world, have been particularly hit hard.
- With schools and organizations closing and institutes and organizations scrambling to figure out ways to replace in-person support that has been commonplace in the community, with many not being able to provide any support at all, several students have had to halt their education and jobs.
- Digital inaccessibility has also become particularly pertinent now with online educational resources, pandemic-related information, among others being inaccessible and thus out of reach. In fact, at I-Stem, we recently conducted a consultation with young people with disabilities in India, and students and professionals shared several challenges that they faced, including inaccessibility of learning management systems, inaccessibility of virtual teaching pedagogies, lack of textbooks, and even lack of accessible recreation amidst the global lockdown.
- What was also particularly concerning was the uncertainty about the post-pandemic world, especially how it relates to young people with disabilities and their needs. Would blind people still be able to get help in the absence of accessible infrastructure with social distancing being the new norm? We are talking of uncertainty about basic human rights here-the right to live with dignity. I strongly believe that even in the pre-Covid world, people with disabilities, especially youth with disabilities, did not enjoy the same basic rights on an equal basis, and Covid has further exacerbated that.
- There needs to be widespread realization of the need to work towards accessibility and equal opportunities for youth with disabilities as equal partners as well as the need to involve us in decision-making.
- My hope is that this will further pressurize companies to consider accessibility right in the beginning of the design process as opposed to an afterthought and Member States and UN Agencies to include youth with disabilities in policy decisions that impact youth with disabilities not just in the time of the COVID-19 but also beyond recovery from the pandemic.
- Youth with disabilities are also taking upon themselves to help others in the community and work towards a more accessible and resilient new normal for everyone.
- Very recently, it was exciting to see the office of the youth envoy profile some of these young activists doing exceptional work to help others in simple and innovative ways. I would also like to congratulate her in particular for all of the work that her office has done for youth, and the keen interest she has shown to include youth with disabilities in various deliberations, and for proactively opening and creating safe spaces for youth with disabilities to meaningfully engage with the international community.
- I look forward to collaborating with many of you on similar initiatives to ensure that the voices of youth with disabilities are well-represented and we all realize our common vision

of a more equitable world. I ask of you the international community to support the Youth Envoy and us young disability activists to further broaden, acknowledge, recognize and officially endorse, and support in globalizing and localizing the space the youth envoy has opened up for us.