Habitat III Pararell Event:

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High Level Meeting and Forum on Disability Inclusion and Accessible Urban Development

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I am honored to be able to speak to you at this forum on disability inclusion and accessibility within the global context of urban development.

As in a number of themes planned for discussions at this Habitat III conferences, risk management at times of disaster is positioned to complement urban development. Given our lives and safety are at stake, it is absolutely necessary to include the voices of disabled persons. Unfortunately, however, this understanding has yet to be reflected in disaster risk reduction at the international level.

I would like to start by talking about why I proposed disability inclusion at the 3rd United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai, Japan last year.

The great earthquake and tsunami that struck northeastern Japan, five years ago, might be fresh in the memory of many of you today. Many lives were lost, and a study later showed that the mortality rate among disabled people was at least twice the total rate. It also showed that one reason for this high mortality rate was that disabled persons had not been involved in the planning and implementation of disaster risk reduction. I was devastated when I thought about those who had become victims, and I felt the need to change this situation where disabled people are not included as important stakeholders even today.

When a disaster occurs, disabled people are prone to be more affected than others. True, there have been talks focusing on how to reduce this risk as low as possible but I think that the main stakeholders, the disabled people, were not the center of the discussions, and in many cases simply observers.

In order to realize an inclusion and equal access I have always stressed the importance of participation of disabled people as stakeholders in disaster risk management and planning if we are to meet their needs. I therefore appealed to UN agencies, governments, and NGOs, emphasizing the importance of full participation of disabled people as we prepared for the Sendai UN conference, last year.

As a result of meticulous planning, to the very last detail for easy and free access within the city and the venue, a large number of disabled people took part in the conference, provided their views and contributed to the inclusion of their voices in the outcome document, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. I truly felt that there was a huge irreversible breakthrough that was achieved in Sendai.

It is not only in disaster risk reduction and urban development, but the participatory decision making of the disabled people is very important in national policies and in the international systems, otherwise their opinions might be muffled up by the voice of the majority which repeated would create a society that is not inclusive nor easily accessible.

I feel that a venue such as the HABITAT III has a critical role to play in bringing the disabled people to the platform of decision-making process and which will become a matter of course in the future.

To make inclusion a reality, The Nippon Foundation is supporting remote participation using Information Communication Technology for the people who are not able to be with us at this forum. We hope that this kind of initiative will be deployed at many international conferences.

In addition, The Nippon Foundation is involved in a new innovative project using modern technology. We are now developing an application, called “Bmaps” for the smartphone jointly with Mr. Kakiuchi who is here today and will speak at the Stakeholders’ Round table on Wednesday.

“Bmaps” provides information in the urban area, such as barrier-free public transportation, hotels, restaurants, shopping malls, to the disabled people. By using “Bmaps”, people will naturally gather at locations that are easily accessible which will contribute to wider area of mobility. You will be hearing more about this “Bmaps” later today.

The global interest of inclusion of disabled people as part of sustainable development goal is ever on the rise today. But only interest and discussions will take us nowhere. Within this rapidly changing world it is time for all people to act together to contribute together to disability inclusion.

One such action is that The Nippon Foundation is planning to hold an international conference of disabled business leaders in collaboration with the World Bank with a hope to expand the still limited number of disabled people in leadership positions.

Today, I have talked about inclusion of disabled people and I feel that the world of human habitation is diverse in nature as are our needs. For example, Japan is the fastest aging society. If we do not stop now and think of how to accommodate the needs of each person, I am sure that our cities and rural areas would be very uncomfortable to live in for not only the disabled people but for old people like myself, and all who need special attention.

I would like to close by saying that this has been a valuable experience for me to participate in this session and most of all,

it is my hope, that one day, a time will come when we will no longer have to set aside special programs to discuss inclusion of disabled people.

Thank you.