**PARLIAMENT OF KENYA**

Kenya Coat of Arms

**THE SENATE**

**REMARKS BY THE HON. SEN. PAUL NJOROGE BEN, MP, DURING THE UNITED NATIONS WORLD CONFERENCE ON DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AT TOHOKU UNIVERSITY, SENDAI JAPAN ON 15TH MARCH 2015**

**Your Excellencies,**

**Honourable Members from Various Legislatures,**

**Distinguished Delegates,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Allow me to begin by expressing my deepest gratitude to the organisers of this conference for extending a formal invitation to me to be present and participate in this international forum. I would also like to extend my sincere appreciation to the Office of the Secretary-General for recognizing the priorities of the initiative Global Alliance for Persons with Disabilities.

This forum provides us with an opportunity to exchange ideas, share our experiences and best practices on Disability-Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DIDRR). First, as persons living with disability; and secondly, as representatives of the people in the respective legislatures.

**Distinguished Delegates,**

It is normally said that **“**Disability is the only club in the world that members are not asked permission to join. We are also the only organization that does not need new members”.

Over the years, Kenya has been exposed to a variety of disasters such as droughts, fires, floods, HIV/AIDS, industrial accidents and terrorism, among others. These very disasters have been visited upon many other jurisdictions across the world.

It is not in doubt that the world has experienced an increase in the frequency of disasters over the past two decades. From earthquakes in Haiti and Japan to hurricanes in The Philippines, it is only realistic to conclude that people living with disabilities are increasingly exposed to myriad challenges.

For instance, in the year 2008, my country Kenya, experienced the worst post-election violence where many people lost their lives and scores of others internally displaced. Many disabled people had to abandon their wheelchairs, crutches and other assistive devices in the flight from their homes and were carried to make shift camps for the internally displaced by friends and relatives.  Some disabled people in these camps died because they could not access the simple health care which their lives depended on. This clearly shows the increased vulnerability of the disabled in times of disasters.

**Distinguished Delegates,**

As you are aware, in 2005 the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA), a global blueprint for disaster risk reduction was adopted. Its goal was to substantially reduce disaster losses by 2015 - in lives and in the social, economic, and environmental assets of communities and countries.

Kenya has shown its commitment towards implementation and domestication of this HFA 2 framework. The Constitution of Kenya has further enshrined the domestication of international protocols through legislation.

The importance of community involvement in disaster risk reduction planning and implementation cannot be downplayed. Community resilience is fundamental in successfully implementing Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) programs. HFA2 needs to be more people-centered. Measures must be taken to ensure that local knowledge and expertise play a central role in DRR planning and implementation at all geographic and political levels. Public participation in the legislative process has been provided for in the Constitution of Kenya.

**Dear Colleagues,**

Vulnerable groups including people living with disabilities are likely to be affected in the event disasters strike. Unfortunately, they are often overlooked and seldom considered as important actors in DRR.

Kenya and countries in Africa are beginning to respond positively to the disproportionate inclusion skewed against persons with disabilities in DRR strategies. Several countries in Africa have developed action plans for addressing and incorporating the specific concerns and limitations of these people in emergency situations, including building designs that must be adhered to.

In this context, the Kenya Government developed a National Policy for Disaster in 2009. This policy aims at the establishment and strengthening of Disaster Management institutions, partnerships, networking and main streaming Disaster Risk Reduction in the development process so as to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable groups to cope with potential disasters.

Within the framework of the Constitution of Kenya, article 54 compels the State to ensure progressive implementation of the principle that at least five percent of the members of the public in elective and appointive bodies are persons with disabilities. Currently there are two Senators and two Members of Parliament nominated to represent the interests of this group. This is an important milestone that allows for inclusion of the disabled in legislation and policy making.

**Distinguished Delegates,**

I do not wish to belabour the benefits of embodying the principles of social inclusion and human rights, youth and women in the national DRR arrangements. Suffice to say, their knowledge and expertise in mobilizing communities into action to reduce risks of potential disasters is fundamental.

To further the disability inclusion agenda, the Senate of the Parliament of Kenya is planning to hold a global conference on disability dubbed ***“The Global Alliance for Persons with Disability (GAPD)”*** on 23rd to 27th September, 2015 in Nairobi. I was the initiator of this conference that aims to bring together key policy makers including Parliamentarians in forming a global organization of disabled parliamentarians that will champion disability inclusion in issues such as legislation and disaster risk reduction.

**Your Excellencies, Fellow Delegates and Colleagues**

From the foregoing, it is evident that achievement of substantial results in implementing DiDRR strategies will require radical changes to current disaster risk management practices. This in turn will require changes in disaster risk governance to build trust and strengthen collaboration.

As I conclude, fellow delegates and colleagues, at the heart of effective collaboration is a commitment to coming together and sharing ideas. This is what the global conference on Disability to be held on September in Nairobi aims to achieve. I appeal to all of you to join us in this initiative that seeks to champion for disability inclusion in decision making and make the world more accommodating to the needs of the persons living with disability.

**I THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION.**

**SENATOR NJOROGE BEN, M.P.**

**THE SENATE**

**PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF KENYA**

**SUNDAY 15TH MARCH 2015**