1. Introduction

It is estimated that by 2050, 66% of the world’s population will be living in cities. The United Nations’ Third Global Conference on Housing and Sustainable Development – Habitat III – will take place in 2016 to review the progress, experience and lessons learnt in the past and to design a “New Urban Agenda”. This Agenda of focused policies and strategies is hoped to harness the power and forces behind urbanization. Habitat III therefore provides an important platform for the world’s urban development policy makers and practitioners, as well as those working in the field of disability to review current progress and practices and consider opportunities for change.

Importantly, the New Urban Agenda needs to ensure that future cities, towns and basic urban infrastructures and services are more environmentally accessible, user-friendly and inclusive of all people’s needs, including persons with disabilities.

**Accessibility and disability inclusion in the contexts of urban development**

Urban environments, infrastructures, facilities and services can impede or enable, perpetuating exclusion or fostering participation and inclusion of all members of society. Too often, urban environments have served as a barrier to the inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities in economic and social development in cities and communities. Lack of accessibility contributes greatly to the disadvantaged and vulnerable situations faced by persons with disabilities, leading to disproportionate rates of poverty, deprivation and exclusion among persons with disabilities.

Making cities and towns accessible and inclusive for all people, including persons with disabilities, is an essential condition for sustainable urban development. The United Nations General Assembly adopted a new international framework for development, “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” in September 2015. World leaders recognized the importance of sustainable and inclusive cities in Goal 11, which emphasizes, among other issues, the importance of accessibility and inclusion for persons with disabilities in urban development contexts. In this regard, they recognized the
need for an inclusive approach to urban development and human settlements that facilitates full and effective participation of all.

In the follow up to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the international community is now faced with the challenge of operationalizing the ambitious goal of building in a sustainable and inclusive way, to create the future we want in the contexts of urbanization. In this context, there is an urgent need to have a focus on accessibility as products, services, built environments and information communication technologies that respond to the interests, needs and capabilities of a wide range of end users, persons with disabilities and other urban dwellers with particular access needs.

2. **High Level Forum on Disability Inclusion and Accessible Urban Development**

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), through its Division for Social Policy and Development (DSPD), and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (MIDUVI) of the Republic of Ecuador, in partnership with the United Nations Secretary General’s Special Envoy on Disability and Accessibility, UN Habitat III Secretariat (tbc), Essl Foundation, The Nippon Foundation, Global Alliance on Accessible Technologies and Environments, Rehabilitation International and the Global Network on Disability Inclusion and Accessible Urban Development, will convene a High Level Forum on Disability Inclusion and Accessible Urban Development in Quito.

**Objectives**

The aim of the Forum on “Disability Inclusion and Accessible Urban Development” is to promote the world’s urban development to be inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities, to ultimately contribute to the emerging “New Urban Agenda” and its implementation. More specifically, the Forum is expected to:

i) Engage various parties, stakeholders and policy makers to ensure the "New Urban Agenda" will not only be sustainable but inclusive and accessible;

ii) Inform and promote awareness among both governmental and non-governmental actors of the role that participatory decision making can bring to development, such as global urbanization and the "New Urban Agenda";

iii) Exchange practical knowledge, technical expertise and real-life experiences, in terms of achievements and obstacles encountered. Examples will highlight processes in the analysis, planning, implementation management and evaluation of urban development that are sustainable, inclusive and accessible for all, and which could inform strategic options to further both the "New Urban Agenda".

**Participation**

The High Level Forum will be attended by high-level representatives of government agencies, experts, local authorities, the private sector, civil society, academia, and the United Nations System, working in the field of disability-inclusion and accessible urban development. The total number of participants is expected to be around 150, including around 50 from outside of Ecuador.

**Expected outcome**
The discussions and its outcome from the High Level Forum will provide a set of recommendations that could make concrete contribution to the Habitat III Conference and to the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. A summary of key outcomes and recommendations from the Forum will be published after the event. All meeting materials, including presentations, will be made available on the United Nations Enable website: http://www.un.org/disabilities/

Organization of work (TBC)

- **Opening:** It is expected that keynote addresses and the following presentations include specific discussions relating to current urban development policies and practices from a disability perspective at the global, regional, and national levels. Additionally, lessons learned in promoting accessibility and disability inclusion in urban development are reviewed.

- **Expert panel:** Review policy frameworks in terms of the universal design in urban planning, accessibility standards and national and international legislations as well as good practices and lessons learned in planning for and building accessible and inclusive cities with a focus on the key areas: urban infrastructure, housing, public spaces, transportation, access to information and communication. In addition, the role of national and local governments as well as representative organizations of persons with disabilities (DPO’s) will be highlighted throughout such review.

- **Closing:** Overall findings and recommendations from the Forum will be shared on promoting accessibility and disability inclusion in the New Urban Agenda and its implementation are issued.

Venue and dates of the side event
The High Level Forum will be held at Room A, UN Pavilion, Quito, Ecuador, on Sunday 16 October 2016.

Languages
The High Level Forum will be conducted in English, with Spanish interpretation. Real-time closed caption will be provided.

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