



**Remarks**

**by**

**H.E. Ambassador John W. Ashe**

**President of the 68<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations**

**General Assembly**

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**High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Realization of the  
Millennium Development Goals and Other Internationally Agreed  
Development Goals for Persons with Disabilities**  
Opening Plenary Meeting

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Honourable Heads of State and Government,  
Secretary-General,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome one and all to this High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on “*The way forward: a disability inclusive development agenda towards 2015 and beyond.*”

At the outset, I would like to thank the distinguished co-facilitators of the outcome document, the Permanent Representative of Philippines, H.E. Mr. Libran N. Cabactulan, and the Permanent Representative of Spain, H.E. Mr. Fernando Arias Gonzalez, for their tireless efforts of working with all stakeholders to achieve the successful outcome we have before us today and we are about to adopt.

I would further like to acknowledge UN Member States for their constructive role during the negotiation process and the Secretariat for providing support. Today, we are also joined by many members of civil society organizations, particularly organizations of persons with disabilities, and I thank them for their commitment to this agenda.

Distinguished Guests,

Disability inclusive development is not a new idea. Our guiding document, the UN Charter, is based on economic and social progress, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, while the Universal Declaration of Human Rights begins with the timeless words: *all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.* During the past decades our United Nations has been promoting the full participation and equality for persons with disabilities. This commitment leaves no room for their exclusion from society and development

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In an attempt to classify their physical and mental differences, some have labelled the disabled “differently able” but let us not forget that people with disabilities – physical, sensory, mental and intellectual – are the world’s largest minority, numbering more than one billion. They are a diverse and varied group, each with unique gifts and abilities, and each with unique challenges. Their lives are often a constant struggle to achieve in every sphere of life but more so, in the performance of daily activities that many of us take for granted. But, in so doing, they teach us not only lessons about love and respect, but also about persevering against the odds. And this is why it is important for us to reflect purposefully about why we are all gathered here today.

Let us take note of the fact that the vast majority of persons with disabilities live in developing countries, and experience disproportionately high rates of poverty. In all parts of the world, they are more likely to experience discrimination and prejudice. Persons with disabilities are subjected to a range of barriers and many are regularly denied the right to education, social security, employment, health and other services that are available to the general public. Far too many are hidden from view by others, and robbed of any contact, dignity or joy because of poverty, lack of support services, an unwarranted sense of shame or terrible ignorance.

In 2000, our General Assembly adopted the Millennium Development Goals. Efforts toward achieving these goals have led to a number of successes in eradicating hunger and poverty, alleviating disease burden, improving access to water and increasing primary education enrolment. However, the unfortunate reality is that persons with disabilities have not benefitted equally. In fact, in all eight MDGs – with attendant targets and indicators – there is no reference to persons with disabilities.

Efforts to redress this imbalance are already under way. In the years since the adoption of the MDGs, our General Assembly has promoted disability-inclusive development as a priority issue; it has also called for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in internationally agreed development goals. The international community has now come to the realization that, in order to achieve our goals, including the MDGs, without incorporating the rights, well-being and perspective of persons with disabilities will be

impossible. Given the size of such a marginalised group, the onus is on us all to ensure that any future Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include the disabled.

Excellencies,

In 2006, we saw significant progress when our General Assembly unanimously adopted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. To date, 134 countries have ratified or acceded to the Convention, which was, from its inception, envisaged as both a human rights and a development instrument.

The Convention is a strong symbol of the international community's commitment to include the disability perspective in all aspects of society and development. And while symbols are no doubt important, this commitment now needs to be fully integrated into all current and future development frameworks and interventions.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This high-level meeting comes at a critical crossroads in the history of the United Nations, particularly for the General Assembly. The theme of today's meeting is inextricably linked to the overarching theme I have selected for this session of the General Assembly, namely, "The Post-2015 Development Agenda: Setting the Stage!" I hope that your further deliberations today will identify constructive ways to integrate the issue of disability into the proposed development agenda that is emerging. We all agree that the core goals must be poverty eradication and sustainable development, which can only happen with greater opportunity for all, equality and inclusive social development. A development path that excludes the participation of persons with disabilities in economic, social or political life can be neither inclusive nor sustainable.

In particular, our efforts at the international level should be focused on providing critical leadership to mobilise action and support for specific policy commitments in national and regional environments and harnessing best practices, experiences and resources from effective multi-stakeholder partnerships. One critical and urgent improvement would be to ensure that all buildings, facilities, spaces are specifically designed to accommodate access

and use by those who are disabled and that more technologies are created to improve their quality of life and fully integrate them into the mainstream of social and work activity and life.

The draft outcome document before us stresses the importance of giving due consideration to persons with disabilities in the post-2015 development agenda. It envisions a fully inclusive society and can guide our efforts towards 2015 and future decades to come. I urge Member States to spare no effort in implementing this outcome document.

Distinguished Guests,  
Excellencies,

A post- 2015 development agenda that benefits ALL amongst us is the vision that we must pledge to achieve. Our journey towards a post 2015 development agenda, must envision a world that is just and equitable for *all* persons – equally and without discrimination.

Thank you.