

1 April 2016

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Mogens Lykketoft,
President of the 70th Session of the General Assembly,
At World Autism Awareness Day**

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, it is a great pleasure to join you to mark this 2016 observance of the World Autism Awareness Day.

Last year, the international community adopted transformative new global agreements – the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the Paris Climate Agreement. Fundamental to these agreements is our pledge to end poverty and to invest in peaceful and just societies, leaving no one behind. Now, it is time for implementation.

In June we will be marking the 10th Anniversary of the landmark Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol, which were adopted by the UN General Assembly on 13 December 2006. The purpose of the Convention is to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, including those with autism.

Autism and other forms of disability are part of the human experience that contributes to human diversity. Autism prevalence figures are growing, 1 in 68 people has an autism spectrum disorder, amounting to an estimated 1% of the world's population. The vast majority of those affected are children. We should aim to ensure that the benefits of existing rights are fully extended and guaranteed to all, regardless of their age or disability.

Today we also celebrate the unique talents of persons with autism. Each must be treated a valued member of our society and thus entitled to equal opportunity in all respects as it pertains to education, employment, participation in social, political and cultural life, access to information, etc.

In order for persons with autism to be able to enjoy equal opportunities, we must eliminate the barriers that “may” hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. These basic principles need to be taken into account as we look ahead to 2030 and begin implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Member States have emphasized the need to mainstream disability in the global development agenda. This means that the needs and rights of persons with disabilities, including autism, need to be taken fully into account, on an equal footing with other citizens, in the design and implementation of all policies and programmes.

In adopting the SDGs in September 2015, the UN General Assembly pledged that no one would be left behind. Let’s make that a reality by building providing an inclusive society and accessible communities where people with autism and other disabilities can thrive, enjoy equal opportunity and thus be empowered.

Thank you.