

13 June 2016

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Mogens Lykketoft,
President of the 70th Session of the General Assembly,
At the opening of the Panel Discussion by the President of the General
Assembly on Persons with Disabilities**

Excellences, ladies and gentlemen. It is my pleasure to welcome all of you to this panel discussion.

The commitment of the international community to promote the full and effective participation and the rights of persons with disabilities in society and development is deeply rooted in UN instruments from the Charter to the newly adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Sustainable Development Goals.

The SDGs outlined a number of thematic priority areas for policy action by Member States, including poverty eradication and reducing inequalities, health, education, employment, social protection, accessibility, humanitarian assistance, data and statistics, international development and multi-stakeholder partnerships.

And today with this panel discussion, we have the opportunity to review progress made and share good practices on how these issues are being addressed at all levels in relation to persons with disabilities.

But first, allow me to give you a few numbers:

Around 15 per cent of the world's population, or an estimated 1 billion people, live with disabilities. That is 1 for every 7.

80 % of all these people live in developing countries. And out of those, half cannot afford health care.

90 % of the children living with disabilities in developing countries do not attend schools. And children with disabilities are also almost four times more likely to experience violence than non-disabled children.

So we can all agree that this is not some small group – some minority – but rather 1 billion people around the globe.

This is about all of us and could be any of us.

There have been many good examples of mainstreaming disability issues in different aspects of the work of the UN, for instance, increasing the amount of ratifications of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

We have reached 164 as of today and this marks a great achievement.

Furthermore, disability issues are being increasingly mainstreamed in different development arenas, such as in the Sendai Framework on disaster reduction, or in the commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit just a few weeks ago.

At Habitat III in Quito in October 2016, I hope we will do likewise in terms of promoting accessibility in urban infrastructure, transportation and all public services.

Nonetheless, there remain significant gaps between international norms and development policy and the practices, programming and efforts on the ground that seek to implement them.

Effective mainstreaming of disability issues relies on inclusive and responsive development policies, strong institutional mechanisms, necessary resources and capacity on the sides of both government and stakeholders at the national and local levels.

One of the major obstacles for the rights and development of persons with disabilities is the lack of data, statistics and information about their situation.

For example, estimates suggest that there are at least 93 million children with disabilities in the world, but numbers could be much higher.

The lack of data and statistics on persons with disabilities contributes to their invisibility and is a major obstacle to achieving suitable development planning and implementation.

We need to get more information, better information and respond better to that information.

Hopefully the recently agreed global indicator framework and the work of the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (HLG) will help improve this situation.

Furthermore, there is an urgent need to engage persons with disabilities not only as beneficiaries but as agents of transformative change in society.

We all should review our development policies and practices as well as existing institutional mechanisms to fully engage persons with disabilities as agents of change in development efforts.

And finally, we need to build broad-based multi-stakeholder partnerships that bring together efforts, knowledge and resources, including from both public and private sectors.

Let me close by quoting a legend, who the world lost recently, Mr. Muhammed Ali:

“Impossible is just a big word thrown around by small men who find it easier to live in the world, they’ve been given, than to explore the power they have to change it. Impossible is not a fact. It’s an opinion. Impossible is not a declaration. It’s a dare. Impossible is potential. Impossible is temporary. Impossible is nothing.”

Let us use this panel discussion to discuss how we will make the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs possible including for persons with disability.

Let us dare to make the impossible possible.

Thank you.