**“Day of General Discussion on the Right to Equality and non-discrimination (Article 5) of Persons with Disabilities”**

**Opening remarks by Ambassador Ulrich Seidenberger, Chargé d’Affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Office of the United Nations and to other International Organizations in Geneva**

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*Madam Chair of the CRPD, Madam Deputy High Commissioner, distinguished Panelists, ladies and gentlemen,*

It is an honor to speak here today at this General Discussion on the Right to equality and non-discrimination of persons with disabilities.

I would like to first of all thank the Committee for inviting me to offer some opening remarks. We are very grateful for the opportunity to contribute to today’s discussion in this forum in order to address the challenges on the path of creating a discrimination-free society with equal opportunities for persons with disabilities.

The work of the Committee is crucial in this process, as it ensures that existing social structures that lead to the discrimination against persons with disabilities are being put into question and eventually removed. I want to underline our appreciation for this important work as well as for the dedication with which the Committee members address these challenges.

As we all know, Article 5 of the Convention of Persons with Disabilities addresses the Right to equality and non-discrimination, which is unfortunately not always guaranteed in today’s societies, where discriminatory practices often remain unchallenged. This includes States Parties’ obligations regarding the protection of person with disabilities from discrimination. Therefore the dialogue today is an important step towards the clarification of legal obligations that Article 5 entails and the elaboration of a General Comment thereto.

However, progress has been made in many countries including my own to overcome discriminatory practices and provide more equal opportunities for persons with disabilities.

In July of last year, in the context of Germany’s National Action Plan 2.0 of the CRPD, the Federal Government has adopted new legislation in order to improve the Act on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. Let me briefly outline the main points of the development of disability equality legislation with regard to Article 5:

* Adapting the concept of disability to the UNCRPD text,
* Improvement of accessibility within the federal administration,
* Wider use of plain language for people with cognitive impairments,
* Clarification of the ban on discrimination for bodies governed by public law by including the principle of denial of reasonable accommodation as a form of discrimination within the meaning of the UNCRPD,
* Establishment of a federal service for accessibility to support authorities in implementing accessibility,
* Establishment of an arbitration body at the office of the Federal Government Commissioner for Matters Relating to Disabled Persons and introduction of an arbitration procedure, and
* Establishment of a legal foundation for the promotion of the participation of disabled persons' associations and self-advocacy organizations.

At the same time several Länder have developed initiatives to transform structures which are counterproductive to the aim of achieving equality for persons with disabilities. An important factor toward this goal is the inclusion of persons with disabilities at the workplace in order for society to understand that disabilities are not inherent to a person but that they are also created by societal structures preventing these persons from fully participating. The goal of these initiatives is to give an incentive to appreciate diversity and take advantage of it instead of building barriers that exclude people.

Of course many challenges still remain in order to fully eliminate the discrimination of persons with disabilities. However, the amount of experts that are assembled here today promises a fruitful discussion that will hopefully shine light on the questions of identifying disability-based discrimination and on how to more effectively enforce the right to equality and non-discrimination.

I wish you all a successful day of discussion.

Thank you.