Your Excellences,

Dear delegates, colleagues and friends,

Greetings from Kuwait where I am conducting Country Visit. I would like to start recognising the initiative of Poland with the support of Kuwait, Peru, Ivory Coast and Germany to hold this first ever Arria-Formula meeting on persons with disabilities in armed conflicts. This is particularly relevant as today we mark the international day of PWD.

As you know, persons with disabilities experience extreme conditions in armed conflicts. They are unable to escape war or find adequate shelter, they face higher death rates and are systematically exposed to discrimination, abuse and violence.

Despite this reality, persons with disabilities encounter major challenges in benefiting from civilian protection and humanitarian responses, including:

* The significant accessibility barriers to access safety measures and humanitarian assistance,
* the absence of disability-related support and services, and
* the lack of awareness and training of those in charge of peacekeeping operations and humanitarian action.

And although it is clear that all parties to armed conflicts have obligations under international humanitarian law to facilitate the protection and safety of persons with disabilities: these high-level political commitments are yet to be transformed into concrete actions.

In this regard, I would like stress three areas that deserve priority action:

First, ensuring disability-disaggregated data collection. Consistent data collection on the situation of persons with disabilities is required to better understand and address challenges in peacekeeping and humanitarian action, as well to evaluate the actual impact of existing efforts.

Second, mainstreaming disability in all peacekeeping operations and humanitarian responses. As anyone else, persons with disabilities require civilian protection and assistance in situations of conflict and humanitarian emergencies. The lack of consideration of this group in such contexts has a disproportionate impact on their survival rates and their access to the needed humanitarian assistance.

Third, improving the accountability within the United Nations. UN efforts in civilian protection or humanitarian responses should systematically report on progress made in the inclusion of persons with disabilities. As of today, there is little evidence of how or if the needs of persons with disabilities are being considered in the design and implementation of UN efforts in this area. As you know, early this year the UN Secretary-General’s Executive Committee took the important decision to promote a system-wide approach to advance disability inclusion in UN work. I am confident that this decision will promote the needed action across all the organization’s pillars.

Excellences, delegates, colleagues and friends,

Some solutions for the protection of our group will come from the Inter-Agency Standing Committee’s guidelines on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian action; nevertheless, little will be achieve without high-level support to include disability among the priorities of the humanitarian system.

Finally, I would like to encourage the Security Council to actively engage in the protection of persons with disabilities in armed conflict and other situations of risk. The council could consider, for example, holding open debates on the situation of persons with disabilities; incorporating persons with disabilities in its briefing and reporting requests on civilian protection; and keeping abreast of the situation of persons with disabilities on armed conflicts as an standing item.

A clear message coming from the Council will make the difference for the lives and security of millions of persons with disabilities.

I thank you.