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**Statement by Ms. Catalina DEVANDAS-AGUILAR**

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56th Commission for Social Development

High Level Panel

“Towards inclusive, resilient and sustainable development: an evidence-based approach to the mainstreaming of disability in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the 2030 Agenda"

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Mr. President,

Distinguished Panellists,

Distinguished Delegates,

I would like to start thanking you for inviting me to participate in this panel to discuss how the mainstreaming of a disability perspective in the implementation of the Agenda 2030 could bring us closer to a more inclusive, sustainable and resilient model of development.

As you may know, in pursuing my mandate as Special Rapporteur, I have placed particular emphasis on the issues of inclusive development, promoting citizenship and change in social perceptions about persons with disabilities as thematic priorities of my mandate.

I have followed closely several international, regional and national processes, including the adoption and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, and I have sought to promote the exchange of knowledge and good practices between the United Nations system, States and civil society to promote an inclusive and sustainable development.

During the first three years of my mandate, I produced six thematic reports that provide answers to some of the questions posed in this panel. For instance: What are the gaps in the enjoyment of rights and in the benefits of development? How to effectively promote development policies that are inclusive of persons with disabilities? How to strengthen an approach that is based on evidence and human rights? How to strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of public policies with the participation of persons with disabilities?

 My reports cover social protection, participation in decision-making, inclusive public policies, support services, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and more recently, legal capacity, an indispensable condition to access rights and services.

I invite you to read them, and to consider implementing their recommendations, which seek to promote public policies that are more inclusive of human diversity.

Today, however, I would like to focus my presentation on the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and more specifically, on the collection of data disaggregated by disability.

 The SDGs constitute an unprecedented global agreement to build a future that is sustainable and inclusive for everyone. Aspiring to “leave no one behind” requires to strengthen human rights, equality and sustainability; it is an inclusive agenda that provides a unique opportunity to develop policies that benefit persons with disabilities, while advancing the realization of their rights.

That said, as I mentioned in several fora, we risk missing this opportunity if we are unable to monitoring how persons with disabilities are participating and benefitting from the implementations of the Agenda 2030.

Mr. President, distinguished delegates,

The Sustainable Development Goals require States to collect data disaggregated by disability in order to monitor and evaluate their implementation.

Article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities also requires that State Parties collect statistical data to enable them to design and implement policies to advance the rights of persons with disabilities.

For many years, the lack of validated methodologies to collect consistent and comparable data was used as an excuse to delay efforts on disability and development. However, since now more than a decade there is a widely tested methodology to obtain data disaggregation by disability: the short set of questions developed by the Washington Group on Disability Statistics.

The Washington Group on Disability Statistics, composed of representatives of more than 140 countries, was established by the Statistical Commission of the United Nations in 2001 to address the urgent need to develop methodologies for data collection on disability. The objective was to create a simple and internationally comparable tool to identify persons with disabilities for purposes of disaggregation.

The short set of six questions can be easily inserted in all national data collection instruments (including population censuses, household and specialized surveys, among others), allowing international comparability of data over time.

These questions have been used in more than 80 countries, and there is broad consensus among the international community that they constitute the best available tool to disaggregate data by disability.

The Statistical Commission of the United Nations and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) have recommended their use in the next round of population censuses in 2020.

Countries from the Asia-Pacific region, through the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia Pacific (UNESCAP) have also recommended their use to produce indicators for the Incheon Strategy on Disability.

The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities also supports and recommends their use to monitor the Convention.

They have also been publicly endorsed by different United Nations entities, civil society organizations and independent experts, in a joint statement in which they recommend their use for the purpose of monitoring the SDGs.

Last year already, the Statistics Commission expressed support for the set of questions to disaggregate data for the SDGs. Similarly, a group of Member States made a similar declaration of support during the 10th session of the Conference of State Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Several international cooperation agencies already use these questions in all their programmes and projects.

As exposed, there is vast consensus that the questions of the Washington Group are the best available instrument to ensure a common minimum denominator to monitor the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals for persons with disabilities.

Distinguished delegates,

Notwithstanding the above, unfortunately the entities responsible for decision-making within the system continue to delay the issuance of a clear and unequivocal recommendation to Member States to use this tool for data disaggregation by disability in the monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals. Moreover, they tell us that there are other tools available, regardless of the fact that they have not been tested, have more than 40 questions and their implementation is very costly.

In doing so, they are providing national statistic offices with the perfect excuse not to disaggregate anything, under the pretext that there is no suitable tools for this purpose. There are so many priorities and themes in the Agenda 2030 that, without a clear message from the system, we persons with disabilities run the risk of being left behind once more.

Those among us who promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities are alarmed and baffled with this situation. This concern should be echoed by the Member States and the international cooperation sector. Without data disaggregated by disability, we will leave millions of people behind.

For this reason, I plea that you join our demand that the methodologies to disaggregate data by disability to monitor the SDGs are defined once for all. In the absence of a recommendation from the United Nations Statistics Division, it is up to the Statistical Commission and the Inter-Agency Expert Group on Indicators to take a decision. We have a unique opportunity in the upcoming session of the Statistical Commission to move forward once and for all on this issue.

With this, the United Nations system can start providing technical assistance to those States which require it.

Distinguished Delegates,

Exactly one year ago, a United Nations official asked me what my urgency was to ensure the collection of disability data to measure the Sustainable Development Goals, since according to him in fifteen years’ time there would surely be a new opportunity to include persons with disabilities.

The question shocked me: a billion persons with disabilities worldwide cannot wait for another fifteen years. 17 years ago we have openly excluded from the Millennium Development Goals, with negative consequences to advance in the global development agenda. Fortunately, the international community amended its mistake and this time it expressed a clear commitment not to leave persons with disabilities behind in the Agenda 2030.

We have the obligation to use this unique opportunity to reduce the inequalities and poverty that affect persons with disabilities. We will not achieve this without data.

Thank you very much.