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Statement by MR. GERARD QUINN,

UNITED NATIONS Special Rapporteur

on THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

46th session of the Human Rights Council

**Agenda Item 3**

**Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities**

GENEVA (ONLINE)

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Madame President of the Human Rights Council,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates and participants,

It is an honour to address this Council for the first time since my appointment as Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities last October.

Before you is my first annual report, submitted pursuant to Council resolution 44/10, which bears the symbol A/HRC/46/27 and is available in accessible formats as well as in an Easy Read version. It includes an overview of the work done in the last year by my predecessor, Catalina Devandas Aguilar, and is followed by an overview of the thematic priorities that I intend to address during my tenure.

I would like to start by briefly highlighting the **work done in the last year by my predecessor**.

* In March 2020, the former Special Rapporteur presented a **report on the impact of ableism in medical and scientific practice** to this Council at its 43rd session. We do not need reminding of the importance of this subject in a pandemic where discriminatory triage policies have been rampant, including with regards access to treatment and vaccination.
* Ms. Devandas also greatly contributed to the **work of OHCHR on COVID-19**, and collaborated with a number of United Nations agencies and stakeholders to ensure that persons with disabilities were not invisible in their responses to the pandemic – nor left behind as we plan for the future.
* The pandemic has shown – if proof were needed – the continued importance of multilateralism. The last thematic report of the former Rapporteur focused on **disability inclusive international cooperation**. I had the honour of presenting it before the Third Committee of the 75th General Assembly last October. This is extremely timely as the world plans for a resilient and inclusive recovery.
* Finally, together with the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on disability and accessibility, my predecessor published the **“International Principles and Guidelines on access to justice for persons with disabilities”** which are available in all the six UN languages as well as in Easy Read versions. Rights, to be effective, have to have remedies, and assuring access to remedies for all is an imperative.
* The two **country visits** planned for 2020, respectively in Botswana and China, had to be postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I intend to take up these visits as soon as possible and welcome the positive engagement of States in this regard.

Let me now turn to the **vision for my mandate**.

In defining the thematic priorities to pursue over the next few years of my tenure, I have engaged in discussions and consultations with a variety of stakeholders, including persons with disabilities and their representative organisations, civil society, academia and others.

The priorities I have identified following these consultations will be distributed among three groups. A particular effort will be made to work jointly on these projects insofar as the subject matter overlaps with the mandate of other mandate holders.

1. The first group has to do with the **grand existential threats that face all of humanity** that underscores the urgency of multilateral action and the need for a strong disability voice. They include:
   1. **The COVID-19 emergency and disability.**  COVID-19 has shown just how fragile supports systems are, the discriminatory impact of rationing in health care services and the heightened vulnerability faced by persons with disabilities in institutions. What does building back better mean for persons with disabilities?
   2. **Climate change.** There is a need for more inclusion of voices of persons with disabilities in national adaptation planning. Otherwise, those farthest behind will be left even further behind.
   3. **Armed conflicts, peace processes and disability.** Maintaining the momentum started by the UN Security Council to focus on the protection of civilians with disabilities during armed conflicts and on the positive and under-appreciated role of persons with disabilities in peace-building processes.
   4. **Extreme poverty and disability.** It is time for a re-think to break free from the cycle of poverty. The UN Sustainable Development Goals alongside the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities points to a different approach, which needs to be clearly articulated.
2. The second group of priorities will address **hidden intersectionalities**. The aim is not merely to see how identities relate to one another but also to reveal underlying systemic or common experience and the roots of accumulated disadvantages.
   1. **Older persons with disabilities**. The move toward the human rights framing on older people is well underway. The time is right to take closer stock of the close intersectionality between old age and disability and the experiences of the two groups. Of special interest to me is the human agency or legal capacity of older persons with disabilities and the future of ‘long-term care.’
   2. **Indigenous persons and disability**. A focus on indigenous persons with disabilities is long overdue and requires us to take seriously cultural diversity in the context of achieving the rights of persons with disabilities.
   3. **Prisoners with disabilities**. This will include specifically mental health issues and situate disability in the broader context of penal reform.
3. The third group will address **specific rights**, **issues or groups and other institutional issues**, including, but not limited to:
   1. **Independent living**. Getting beyond rhetoric to action must necessarily mean the need for radical innovation in howservices can be personalized and delivered around the world and how they can be built up in resource-poor environments. Service reform in the community is also key to the transition toward non-coercive options in the field of mental health.
   2. **Artificial Intelligence and disability.** our world is being re-made by Artificial Intelligence (AI). This promises many breakthroughs and it poses certain risks for persons with disabilities. It is time we took stock in order to maximize the benefits and minimize the risks.
   3. **Access to, and participation in, culture.** culture is central to our collective self-understanding and imagination. To participate in its formation, to have broader and equal access to it and to assume roles in its production means to be part of the ongoing renewal of our societies.
   4. **The multiplier role of** **regional arrangements/organizations.** Such bodies have a lot to offer their Member States and have much to offer/share with each other. It is time to take stock and assist regional arrangements to move forward together.

Ensuring a strong focus on gender and the implications for women and girls with disabilities will be indispensable, and will cut across all of my work.

Excellencies,

Distinguished participants,

I look forward to our discussion today and thank you for your engagement with my mandate.

[ENDS

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