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**STATEMENT BY MR. GERARD QUINN,
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ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

Thirteenth Conference of States Parties to the
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Closing remarks

Interactive dialogue on the Implementation of the Convention of States Parties
with the United Nations system and other stakeholders

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Mr. Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates and participants,

I would like to begin by thanking the Bureau for the invitation to participate in this interactive dialogue, a true space of accountability on the work carried out by the United Nations in relation to the rights of persons with disabilities.

As you know, my mandate has actively supported and contributed to the process leading to the adoption of the **United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS)**, and I wish to commend the work of my predecessor, Catalina Devandas-Aguilar, on this matter. I look forward to continuing in this path and to supporting the United Nations system to become more inclusive for persons with disabilities.

The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has recently stressed that its understanding of equality is based on personhood: an open acknowledgement of accumulated disadvantages, a willingness to positively accommodate the difference of disability and a fresh approach to social supports. It summarises that approach as ‘Inclusive Equality.’ I see the UNDIS as a way of achieving ‘Inclusive Equality’ within the United Nations system and setting an example for others.

Progress is being made. It is encouraging to see that many United Nations agencies and bodies already had a head start in implementing the UNDIS and are successfully integrating disability inclusion into their work and procedures.

Excellencies,
Distinguished participants,

I would like to use this opportunity to share some information on the **work done in the last year by my predecessor**, and then share my vision for the upcoming 6 years of the mandate.

In March 2020, the former Special Rapporteur presented a report on **the impact of ableism in medical and scientific practice** to the Human Rights Council at its 43rd session. We don’t need reminding of the importance of this subject in a pandemic where discriminatory triage policies are rampant.

She has also been very actively involved in contributing to the overall **OHCHR work on COVID-19**, and collaborated with a number of United Nations agencies and other stakeholders to support their response to the COVID-19 pandemic and crisis. The aim was to ensure that persons with disabilities were not invisible in the 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. For her last thematic report, she held an expert consultation and conducted research to inform the report on **disability inclusive international cooperation**, which I had

the honour of presenting 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 is available in English, French and Spanish as well as in Easy-to-read versions. Human rights advances remain ephemeral so long as individuals are not given the means to ventilate claims and have them addressed. 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, were unfortunately postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I intend to take up these visits and look forward to engaging with States in this regard.

Excellencies,
Distinguished participants,

As you know, I took up the role of Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities last October, and am currently in the process of defining the **vision for my mandate** and setting some priorities to pursue over the next few years. I will present my “vision” report to the Human Rights Council next March.

The priorities I have identified, in consultations with a wide array of stakeholders, organizations of persons with disabilities and disability experts, are likely to be spread among three different groups:

- 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:
 - a. **The COVID-19 emergency** which has shown just how fragile supports systems are, the discriminatory impact rationing in health care services and the heightened vulnerability faced by persons with disabilities in institutions.
 - b. **Climate change**: more specifically, the need for more inclusion of voices of persons with disabilities in national adaptation planning.
 - c. **Armed conflicts and disabilities**, and in particular the protection of civilians with disabilities during armed conflicts and the positive and under-appreciated role of persons with disabilities in peace processes.
- 2) The second group of priorities will address **hidden intersectionalities**. The aim is not merely to see how groups relate to one another but also to reveal underlying systemic or common experiences and the roots of discrimination.
 - a. **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 especial interest is the future of ‘long-term care.’

- b. **Indigenous persons and disability**, which requires us to take seriously cultural diversity in the context of achieving the rights of persons with disabilities and
 - c. **Prisoners with disabilities**, including specifically mental health issues.
- 3) The third group will address **specific rights**, issues or groups and other institutional issues, including, but not limited to:
- a. The role of **Regional Arrangements/Organizations** in advancing the rights of persons with disabilities. They 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.
 - b. The need for radical innovation in how **services are re-imagined and delivered** around the world and how they can be built up in resource poor environments. We brought people to services in the past – now we need to bring services to people. Covid-19 has cruelly exposed the fragility of existing service models.
 - c. **Access to, participation in culture** – the role of culture and disability groups in democratic renewal and the re-imagining of societies.

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 working with UN agencies; partners and Country Teams, to support UNDIS implementation, particularly in regards to peacekeeping operations, development support and in the context of emergency and humanitarian crisis. I see great potential in the tool of public procurement to advance the goals of UNDIS and am especially interested to see a uniform understanding of ‘reasonable accommodation’ emerge.

I wish to conclude by reiterating my commitment to continuing and strengthening efforts towards making the United Nations system a strong actor in disability inclusion. I look forward to working with the UN System to promote the rights of persons with disabilities worldwide.

Thank you.

[ENDS]