

**PGA Opening Remarks at the 17th session of the Conference of States Parties
to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)
Tuesday, 11 June 2024, 10:00 am – 01:00 pm, GA Hall**

*Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,*

I extend my gratitude to His Excellency, Tarek Ladeb, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Tunisia, and President of the **Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**, for inviting me to address you today. Unfortunately, competing commitments have summoned me away from New York, making my participation possible only virtually.

The numbers of those affected by the differently abled plight speak for themselves – as **over 1.3 billion individuals worldwide** are persons with disabilities.

They are among the most vulnerable populations – enduring disproportionate levels of poverty, marginalization and discrimination.

Women and girls with disabilities are particularly vulnerable.

But we must also acknowledge the many positive examples of acts by persons with disabilities, who continue to inspire us with their courage and determination – reminding us of what can be achieved when they are empowered and supported to reach their ultimate potential.

Stories such as that of **Antonio Fantin** – a prolific swimmer and Paralympic champion, who we welcomed to New York this past week.

This issue deeply resonates with me – and we must, in transforming into inclusive societies do all that we can to ensure that other priorities can never come at the expense of those who need to be always a priority.

Accordingly, we must be proactive in fully implementing the **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)**.

Governments must lead by example in upholding the Convention's principles to realize the rights of persons with disabilities by giving expression substantively to the motto: "**Nothing about us, without us.**"

We must ensure that persons with disabilities are actively involved in all aspects of life – and on an **equal basis** with others.

The CRPD is the first comprehensive human rights treaty – with a clear social development dimension, advancing disability rights worldwide.

With **190 States Parties**, I am delighted that its near-universal ratification reflects growing global solidarity with and commitment to the rights of people with disabilities.

Over the years, this Conference of States Parties has become the most important forum to promote and protect these rights.

As important as they are by way of taking stock of the global status of meaningfully implementing the CRPD, your deliberations today assume enhanced significance as feed-stock into the preparations for the **Summit of the Future in September** – which offers a unique opportunity to reignite multilateral action for impactful solutions, including the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities.

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

As I conclude, I reassure you that as President of the General Assembly, I am fully committed to ensuring the United Nations is a universally accessible space.

To this end, you may be aware that I appointed the Permanent Representatives of Panama and the United States as **Co-Chairs of the Steering Committee on Accessibility**.

With their support, together with that of the Secretariat, we continue to make improvements here at UN Headquarters – as evidenced by the accessibility gate which now allows persons with disabilities to enter the premises without assistance, and the Rostrum in the GA Hall, which is also fully accessible.

And, with much thanks to the Republic of Korea's contribution – we now have an **accessibility center** right here at UNHQ.

In collaboration with DGACM, the OPGA has organized training sessions on accessibility and sensitivity awareness for delegates and UN staff over the past two years.

I propose to continue and to encourage this practice to foster an inclusive working environment for all during the remainder of my tenure – while acknowledging that more, much more, remains to be done.

To make tangible progress, I end by calling upon all Governments and stakeholders to:

- mainstream the rights of persons with disabilities, incorporating their views in all policy design and implementation,
- collaborate with persons with disabilities to create and deliver solutions in every country and community,
- and to act with urgency to uphold the rights of persons with disabilities.

I thank you.