



17th Conference of the States Parties on the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – General debate

Statement by Hon. Dulles Alahapperuma, Member of Parliament & Chair of the Sri Lankan parliamentary caucus for the inclusion of persons with disabilities

Mr. President,
Excellencies,

At a juncture when our actions in the past and their consequences to the present are a point of discussion and debate, and as we look for ways to resolve the multifold challenges of an uncertain future, Sri Lanka is of the view that this year's theme "Rethinking disability inclusion in the current international juncture and ahead of the Summit of the Future" is of utmost relevance for several reasons:

From a Global Context: The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities and highlighted the vulnerabilities of people with disabilities. Re-evaluating inclusion strategies is critical to ensure they are not left behind in recovery efforts.

Technological Advancement: Rapid technological progress offers new opportunities for inclusion, from assistive technologies to accessible digital platforms. However, these must be leveraged thoughtfully to avoid widening the digital divide.

International frameworks, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), provide a foundation for disability inclusion. The Summit of the Future can serve as a platform to strengthen and update these commitments.

Intersectionality: Addressing disability inclusion requires recognizing the intersecting identities and multiple discriminations that people with disabilities may face, including those based on gender, race, and socioeconomic status.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Ensuring disability inclusion is essential for achieving the SDGs, particularly those related to education, employment, and reducing inequalities.

In the lead-up to the Summit of the Future, it is crucial to incorporate diverse perspectives, foster collaboration among stakeholders, and commit to actionable outcomes that advance disability inclusion globally.

The Summit of the Future scheduled for this September aims to address critical global challenges and strengthen international cooperation. It is important to ensure specific accommodations for the rights of disabled individuals and have those rights highlighted in the available pre-summit discussions and documentation.

Sri Lanka recognizes the fundamental importance of upholding the rights of all individuals, including those with disabilities, as embodied in the CRPD. We are here today with a dedicated commitment to implement the full integration of our disabled community as valued and active participants in the life of our nation. Sri Lanka is also pleased to play its role as a Vice-Chair of this session and is also honored to be co-chairing the first roundtable on “International Cooperation to Promote Technology Innovations and Transfer for an Inclusive Future.”

Sri Lanka takes this opportunity to reaffirm its unwavering commitment to the principles of equality, inclusion, and empowerment for persons with disabilities. In recent years, Sri Lanka has made significant progress in advancing the rights of persons with disabilities. Our government has taken proactive steps to implement inclusive policies and programs aimed at promoting accessibility, education, employment, and social inclusion for persons with disabilities across the country. This would not be possible without the advocacy undertaken by stakeholders such as the Disability Organizations Joint Front and organizations for persons with disabilities. In recognition of inclusivity as a cross-cutting

issue, the Sri Lankan parliament last November, formed the parliamentary caucus for the inclusion of persons with disabilities. I am really pleased to deliver this statement in my capacity as the Chairman of the parliamentary caucus.

Sri Lanka was pleased to be invited to implement the UN Partnerships on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD) Fund Inception Phase, in 2023. As a key activity of the Inception Phase, an induction training of around 30 stakeholders comprising representatives from government, disabled persons organizations, and civil society organizations was conducted in May this year. The induction was designed to provide stakeholders with a foundational knowledge of the CRPD, disability-inclusive SDGs, and the Strategic Operations Framework of the UNPRPD. This induction program will be followed by a situational analysis to identify priorities for disability-inclusive development, achievement of inclusivity in implementing Agenda 2030, and the full and effective implementation of CRPD norms.

Furthermore, we are actively engaging with stakeholders to raise awareness and promote a culture of inclusion and acceptance within our society. We are also accelerating the process of enacting the Disability Rights Bill. Updating relevant legislation as well as public education remains significant factors in creating an enabling environment to realize the rights in the CRPD.

While we acknowledge the progress made, we also recognize that there are still challenges to overcome. We are committed to addressing these challenges through continued collaboration with civil society organizations, disability rights advocates, and international partners. We are dedicated to fostering a society where the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities are respected and upheld in all spheres of life.

Thank you!