

Speech (288 words)

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My name is James Casserly, and I'm from Dublin, Ireland. I'm a young person with a disability and a global youth champion with Sightsavers' Equal World campaign.

Ahead of the World Social Summit, we have been calling on global leaders to take bold action on disability rights.

Working with young people with disabilities from around the world, we've pushed member states to produce a strong political declaration that fully includes people with disabilities.

We're encouraged to see the draft Doha Political Declaration explicitly reference our rights and recognises the crisis of youth not in education, employment, or training - commonly referred to as NEETs.

Behind these words are people and if implemented, this declaration could transform lives – particularly the lives of young people with disabilities – in four key ways.

- **Income security:** Disability-inclusive social protection could provide stable income and community services that reduce poverty
- **Access to services:** Commitments to universal health coverage, inclusive education, and accessible infrastructure could remove barriers to schools, clinics, transport, and information.
- **Employment:** Stronger labour laws, skills training, and entrepreneurship support can open doors to decent work and reduce unsafe, informal jobs
- **Participation:** Recognising the role of organisations of persons with disabilities ensures our voices shape laws, budgets, and policies

But let's be clear: reaching consensus is only the beginning. Without disability-specific targets, funding, and accountability, progress will be uneven. National action plans with clear indicators and timelines are essential.

Exclusion is costly. Up to 7 per cent of GDP in some countries. Inclusion, on the other hand, drives innovation and equitable growth. Investing in disability-inclusive youth empowerment isn't just right - it's smart.

Let's move from promises to practice. From commitments to change. Together, we can build an equal world.

Thank you.