

2 December 2011

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser,
President of the 66th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Commemoration of the International Day of Persons with
Disabilities**

Delivered by Ambassador Mutlaq M. Al-Qahtani, Chef de Cabinet, on behalf of the President of the General Assembly

Madame Deputy Secretary-General,
Distinguished panelists,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The President of the General Assembly, His Excellency Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser regrets that he is not able to be with you today, as he is traveling on official business.

As Chef de Cabinet for the President, I have the pleasure of delivering the following message on his behalf.

Today we commemorate both the International Day of Persons with Disabilities and the 30th anniversary of the United Nations International Year of Disabled Persons.

An estimated fifteen per cent of the world's population has a disability.

Over two thirds of persons with disabilities live in developing countries.

It is no secret that women, men and children with disabilities often face stigma and discrimination, including those in countries with high living standards.

Many cannot participate fully in their societies.

Disabled populations are often the tragic consequence of war and conflict.

Worldwide, the link between disability, poverty and social exclusion is clear and direct.

Yet we have at our finger tips international human rights instruments that protect and promote the rights of persons with disabilities.

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights reminds us that all human beings shall enjoy the same rights and freedoms, without distinction of any kind.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted in 2006 and entered into force in May 2008, covers the full spectrum of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights.

It aims to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and fundamental freedoms by persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity.

Today, we commemorate this Convention's adoption by the General Assembly. We celebrate its acceptance by over half of all countries around the world, and we encourage the other half to commit to its ratification.

For it is only if the Convention is implemented at the national level that it can have any positive impact on the lives of persons with disabilities.

As is the case with all human rights treaties, the obligation for implementation falls on States parties.

But we all have a role to play.

States are assisted through the oversight mechanisms provided by the Convention and its Optional Protocol, and it is our shared responsibility to make these function properly. To make them accessible to all persons affected by disabilities. And to disseminate them widely.

This will require changes not only in law, policies and programmes, but in attitudes as well.

Change takes time and can be slow, but at a minimum all persons with disabilities must enjoy equal respect and dignity— nothing less.

The General Assembly has long reiterated the integration of disability into the international discourse regarding development, peace and security, and human rights. These include discourses leading to the International Year of Disabled Persons, and later to the International Decade, which began in 1983.

Just a few weeks ago, under the leadership of the Philippines and Tanzania, the Assembly demonstrated its strong commitment to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in development.

The Assembly adopted a resolution which decided to hold a high-level meeting on disability and development.

This meeting will take place on twenty-three September 2013, the day before the beginning of the General Debate, thus giving it maximum visibility and encouraging Member State participation at the highest level.

Before concluding, I would note that “Sustainable development and global prosperity” is one of the four key areas on which I have invited the Assembly’s membership to focus its work during this session.

As we work towards the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development – Rio+20 - and as the agreed date for achieving the MDGs approaches, let us seize all opportunities to ensure the inclusion of disability in the development agenda post-2015.

It strikes me that "disability" contains a crucial word: "ability". Let us reaffirm today our commitment to building inclusive and empowering communities that harness the abilities of all and guarantee equal rights, freedoms and dignity.

Thank you.