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**Department of Economic and Social Affairs**

“CRPD and Inclusive Development: DESA’s work to mainstream disability and empowerment of persons with disabilities in development.”

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on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities  
Key Note address at the “Pre-Congress Workshop on CBR and CRPD”  
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Introduction to DESA’s work on disability

DESA supports intergovernmental processes (General Assembly, ECOSOC and the Commission for Social Development) to develop normative and policy framework and standards on development. DESA is responsible for the “UN development pillar” and works with governments, civil society, academic institutions and other stakeholders. SCRPD/DESA served as the Secretariat for the UN Ad Hoc Committee on Disability that drafted the Convention.

Three pillars of the UN- development, human rights and peace and security and its cross-sectionalities- for example disability as both development and human rights issue- the two sides of the same coin would require us to use an integrated approach to bring together both normative and policy development, involving policy, expert and advocacy communities with a focus on empowerment and participation of persons with disabilities and their communities.

As a focal point on disability of the United Nations, SCRPD (Secretariat for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities)/DESA is mandated to play a central role in moving forward the disability rights agenda in the broad developmental frameworks, promoting the rights of persons with disabilities in all aspects of economic and social development.

**Background**

The goal of the United Nations - to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom –is deeply rooted in the commitment of the international community to build societies based on justice and equity- the core value of inclusive development.

The work of the Organization in disability in its early period is focused on improvement of the well-being of persons with disabilities to meet their needs in the social context. In the 1960s, the international community adopted the international human rights conventions both in civil and political and economic, social and cultural realms, resulted in a fundamental reevaluation of the rights of persons with disabilities within the context of development. The growing concern for the need of adopting a human rights perspective since 1970s was specifically addressed by the United Nations in adoption of the declarations concerning the rights of persons with disabilities.

Promoting the human rights of persons with disabilities in development became a part of the established international policy agenda in the 1980s since adoption of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons by the General Assembly at its thirty-seventh session in 1982. The World Programme transformed the disability issue from “social welfare” issue into that of integrating the human rights of persons with disabilities in all facets of development. The Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities were adopted by the United Nations in 1993 to focus on the human rights perspective of the World Programme of Action. Though the Standard Rules was not a legal instrument, it has been widely used as a set of strategic guidelines to promote the rights of persons with disabilities.

The United Nations development conferences and summits in 1990s and in their respective five-year reviews and other follow - ups, particularly the Millennium Development Goals and other relevant international commitments, on such issues as poverty eradication, income generation, physical accessibility, organization of persons with disabilities, advancement of disabled women, adequate and accessible shelter and other sectors.

### **Recent Development**

There is a new impetus to mainstream disability into development by a wide range of stakeholders, involving national, regional and global action and networks.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is the first comprehensive and universal legal instrument for the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities. The adoption of the Convention by the United Nations General Assembly in 2006 was the culmination of many years of tireless efforts by the international community. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is the very first human rights treaty of the 21<sup>st</sup> century - this international convention is designed to promote and protect the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities, based on the holistic approach and incorporated both the normative and substantive aspects of a broad human rights framework related to the advancement of persons with disabilities. In May last year, we celebrated the entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol in a solemn yet vibrant ceremony with participation of UN Secretary-General Mr. Ban-Ki Moon, Under-Secretary-General of Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Mr. Sha Zukang, Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights as well as prominent leaders of the disability community.

Through *the new disability architecture*, which consists of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons, the Standard Rules and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities, the international community has directed its attention to the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities from the rights - based approach, in society and development.

As a global focal point on disability, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, in its primarily normative and analytical role in global policy matters, we seek to maximize such contributions to the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

Together with our colleagues from the UN system, we developed the Inter Agency Support Group on the CRPD in 2007. The IASG has adopted in 2008 a Joint Statement of Commitment and are continuing to develop a strategy and plan of action to mainstream disability in the policies and programmes of the different entities and to work collaboratively.

DESA, OHCHR and ILO together with IASG, are working closely to build a collaborative mechanism and develop tools with our colleagues from the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) to contribute to the work of Country Teams (CTs) and United Nations Development Assistance Framework and Common Country Assessment (UNDAF-CCA framework).

Last year during the 63<sup>rd</sup> session of the General Assembly, through its resolution 63/150 of 18 December 2008<sup>1</sup>, highlighted that for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals, it is necessary that persons with disabilities are included in all its processes, so that the cycle between poverty and disability is broken. With eighty per cent of persons with disabilities - more than 400 million people - living in poor countries, urgent action is needed. Persons with disabilities should be agents and beneficiaries of all aspects of development, human rights and peace and security of the international community.

The Assembly, in the same resolution, requested the Secretary-General for “updates” of the World Programme of Action and a “report” on the situation of persons with disabilities in the context of MDGs. DESA, in collaboration with other UN agencies, funds and programmes will organize expert meetings and produce the reports for the consideration of the Assembly for its debate on the issue of mainstreaming of disability in MDGs, during its 64<sup>th</sup> session this year.

The very first Conference of States Parties to the CRPD took place in October/November, during which the members of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities were elected. The 12 members of the Committee were elected by States parties with consideration being given to equitable geographical distribution; different forms of civilization, representation of the principal legal systems; balanced gender representation and participation of experts with disabilities. The Conference is envisaged as an important mechanism for implementation of the CRPD, in which the States Parties are expected to consider broader issues on the implementation of the Convention. The details of its work will be further developed by the States Parties in consultation with all stakeholders.

The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the expert body charged with monitoring of the implementation of the Convention by the States Parties, is meeting for the first time at the end of this month in Geneva. The focus will be to

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<sup>1</sup> Contained in A/63/424, as draft resolution I.

establish its presence in the UN human rights structure and to decide on its working methods as well as to build on existing experience of other treaty bodies.

### **International Framework for Mainstreaming Disability and Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities in Development and the Asia Pacific Region.**

The following is a list of issues for discussion during this CBR Congress on the linkages between the disability rights and the CBR network in the Asia-Pacific region;

- Future implementation of the Convention would require the international community to (1) strengthen existing collaborative frameworks, such as regional decades and multi-stakeholder networks and to (2) advance the disability agenda in the international developmental frameworks. The CBR network can continue to play a leading role at this crucial stage: linking the promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities with concrete steps- such as promoting accessibility to ensure inclusion of the disability rights agenda in all aspects of development.

The United Nations is seeking to promote inclusive, equitable and sustainable development, can promote physical accessibility, provide economic opportunities and generate employment. The CBR mechanisms can raise awareness and stimulate action on accessibility of infrastructure, including transportation, communication systems, the physical environment, including public space.

The ESCAP region has been a global leader in promoting the international policy and legal discourse on disability in the Asia Pacific region. The Disability community in the Region has been the leading partner for the UN ESCAP to promote the Asia-Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons and the Biwako Millennium Framework (2002) as well as the mid-point review of the Decade, the BMF plus Five.

- The Second Asian and Pacific Decade (2003-2012) was adopted in 2002 based upon the Biwako Millennium Framework (BMF) for Action towards Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific as well as BMF plus Five. The intergovernmental action through BMF could provide a concrete basis/good practice for mainstreaming disability in the international developmental contexts. CBR initiatives directly respond to the emerging international disability agenda for the 21st century- strengthening the existing framework and rising up to new challenges.
- The success in the regional Decade was replicated by other regions, such as the African Decade of Disabled Persons (200-2009), Arab Decade of Disabled Persons (2004-2013), and American Decade of Disabled Persons (2007-2016). These “Decades” could stress the importance of the regional frameworks and international development cooperation, especially in view of the newly adopted Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and other relevant norms and standards.
- As south-south and triangular cooperation increases its importance in development cooperation, CBR could significantly contribute to the capacity building of organizations of persons with disabilities and relevant non-governmental organizations of developing countries of the Asia-Pacific Region through study tours, field visits, workshop, training, and fellowships for persons with disabilities. DESA in collaboration with leading experts could contribute to the CBR frameworks and may develop options for collaborations to promote capacity - building both within and outside the Asia Pacific Region provided an impetus for major progress in international discourse on the rights of persons with disabilities for implementation of the Convention.
- With this background, a wide range of experience and activities of the Asia Pacific Region already covers “development picture” both from the normative and operational perspectives. With its rich experience in the Region, the CBR could operationalize the Convention and effect practical changes. Examples of good practice in DPOs in the Region- especially the collaborative- and

multi-stakeholder framework during the past two regional decades that advanced the disability rights agenda in development may provide a concrete basis for capacity development in other developing countries.

- DESA very much looks forward to working closely with the CBR community in the region and at global level to develop options for promoting policies, strategies and programmes to advance the rights of persons with disabilities in development- taking into account the realities of South. It is particularly important in view of the mandates to strengthen the linkage between the global effort and the regional framework, which together will support the national action and reinforce the global normative frameworks to promote disability rights and internationally agreed development goals, including MDGs.

### **Conclusive remarks**

The CBR and its stakeholders have long worked to harness the great potential of persons with disabilities to contribute to advancement of persons with disabilities through their empowerment and that of their communities. This dovetails perfectly with the work of the United Nations for promotion of universal human rights in social progress and better standards of life in development.

The Convention is a powerful tool to mainstream disability and empowerment of persons with disabilities in all aspects of development – for harmonization of legislation, policies, programmes as well as advocacy in line with the goal and objectives of the Convention- It is up to those working on the ground to use it most effectively - along with other relevant international norms and standards - for the achievement of our goals toward inclusive development - promoting the universal human rights of persons with disabilities in development worldwide.