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### Commission on the Status of Women

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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and  
to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly  
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and  
peace for the twenty-first century”**

### **Statement submitted by Handicap International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## **Statement**

### **Gender and Disability Inclusion: Advancing Equity for Women and Girls with Disabilities**

This statement is submitted by Handicap International on behalf of the Making It Work global initiative on Gender and Disability Inclusion. This global multi-stakeholder initiative aims at documenting good practices on preventing, eliminating and ending violence against women and girls with disabilities.

The recommendations below are drawn from the above mentioned practices, the gaps and successes they've identified in addressing disability and gender-based violence, and will refer to specific targets of Goal 5 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The following messages want to provide the ground for supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as its monitoring framework, with a particular attention to its Goal 5, Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. If such is the ambition of the 2030 Agenda, it is imperative that global and national indicators address adequately the rights and needs of women and girls with disabilities, and that discriminatory practices, policies and laws come to an end. With no empowerment of all women and girls, including those with disabilities and the most marginalized, the objectives of this transformative agenda will remain unmet.

It is thus of utmost importance that States identify inclusive mechanisms for the development and implementation of action plans, as well as inclusive tools for monitoring and evaluating the collection of data on progress in the Agenda 2030 that needs to be disaggregated by gender, age, disability and support needs. Taking proactive steps to analyse the potential for replication and engage in effective scaling up will only be possible if resources are used effectively so that the needs of the most marginalized women and girls, including those with disabilities are reached, monitored and fulfilled.

"End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere". In relation to target 5.1, we identified the gaps below and would like to recommend the following:

Women with disabilities are often unaware of their civil and political rights and are forced to live in institutions against their will or are marginalized within their own communities and families. This status of isolation is the precondition for acts of violence perpetrated against them.

Women with disabilities who report cases of violence to the police face multiple barriers in accessing justice. They are not believed by the police or the evidence that supports their claims is mishandled. They are not adequately protected by the legal system and are denied legal aid support and recognition of their legal capacity in order to seek meaningful redress within the system.

## **Recommendations**

Governance reform programs and human rights programming need to do more to enforce the realization of articles 4 and 12 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. One of the priorities should be the development and

review of the national legislative framework to make the transition from substitute decision making to supported decision making. It is of utmost importance to replicate efforts of civil society and States to reinstate the legal capacity of men and women with disabilities so that they can claim their rights and make their own decisions.

States must take steps to fulfil their obligations under international human rights law to guarantee equal opportunities to women with disabilities to access justice.

States should take up data collection as an urgent matter to look into if the 2030 Agenda and Beijing +20 are to succeed. Efforts to support self-advocacy of women and girls with disabilities will succeed if gender programs involve and engage men for gender and disability programs to end violence.

“Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation”. In relation to target 5.2, we identified the gaps below and would like to suggest the following:

Women with disabilities face invisibility because of the intersection of gender, disability and other factors of discrimination. Moreover, violence experienced by women with disabilities remains invisible in most countries in the world.

There are insufficient links between disability-focused civil society organizations and States and/or multilateral actors. Too often, civil society is responsible for ensuring disability inclusion while this is the State’s responsibility to do so. As a result, existing gender programs and gender-based violence case management systems, policies, and shelters are not inclusive of women with disabilities. The active participation of women and men with disabilities, as well as the development of new tools, would thus contribute to creating inclusive gender programming and gender-based violence responses.

### **Recommendations:**

States, Disabled Peoples Organisations, mainstream civil society organizations and United Nations agencies should give space to the voices of women with disabilities and recognize their decision-making power to negotiate their position and guide their actions. Such action will generate meaningful participation, and foster communication between civil and States.

Outreach programs to women (and men) with disabilities, including documentation of factors contributing to their discrimination and the scope of violence they experience are needed to break the circles of isolation. Media and researchers are essential vehicles to generate quality information, denounce abuse and violations, and recall States of their duties to respect, protect and fulfil individuals’ rights under international and national law.

Additional systematic consultation between States and gender focused civil society organizations of women with and without disabilities and their organizations are needed during policy making and tools development, such as action plans.

“Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International

Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform of Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences.”

To ensure equal access to sexual health and reproductive rights, the empowerment and capacity development are essential components. Thus, in relation to target 5.6 we identified the gaps below and would like to suggest the following:

Disempowerment of women and girls with disabilities is widespread. It is rooted in the exclusion of women with disabilities from education, poverty eradication programs, and the non-prioritization of gender and violence in the disability, human rights, gender, national and global policies. It also results from insufficient community based support services, the lack of data, and gender and cultural practices that are disempowering. The disempowerment of women with disabilities can also affect families. It is equally important to ensure that service providers, Disabled Peoples Organisations, gender-based management case systems, and other relevant actors are empowered through capacity-building and the development of their skills to adequately address the needs of women and girls with disabilities, who experience violence and abuse, and prevent situations that could further expose them to neglect, abuse or exploitation.

**Recommendations:**

Increase and upscale capacity development programming for Disabled Peoples Organisations, states, United Nations agencies, and service providers engaged in the protection and redress of Gender Based Violence. States must allocate sufficient resources on capacity development in these areas, including through the efforts funded through international cooperation in emergency and development contexts, in realization of articles 11 and 32 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This includes investments to develop the capacities of Disabled Peoples Organisations, women’s rights and gender organisations to engage more effectively in the defence of the rights of women and girls with disabilities.

Following the provisions under Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities article 14.1, 15.1 and 16, it is imperative that measures are taken to guarantee that services, which support women who experience violence and abuse, offer them legal aid and safe shelters, can be accessed by women and girls with disabilities on an equal footing with other women and girls.

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**Submitted by:**

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