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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 World Blind Union, 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

The International Disability Alliance is the network of global and regional organisations of persons with disabilities currently comprising seven global and four regional organisations of persons with disabilities. With member organisations around the world, The International Disability Alliance represents the over one billion persons with disabilities worldwide, the world's largest — and most frequently overlooked — minority group. The International Disability Alliance's mission is to promote the effective implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as well as compliance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities within the whole United Nations system, including in the work of the Commission on the Status of Women.

The International Disability Alliance welcomes the 60th session of the Commission on the Status of Women on 'Women's empowerment and its link to sustainable development', which provides an important forum for discussing and raising awareness about the rights of women and girls with disabilities. The International Disability Alliance encourages the Commission on the Status of Women to adopt an agreed conclusion, that contains guidance to identify issues for States and UN-Women to address in their policies and programmes promotion, and fulfilment of the rights of women and girls with disabilities.

The International Disability Alliance welcomes and celebrates the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the commitments made by the Heads of State and Government from all Members of the United Nations towards the implementation of the new Agenda for all people and the planet. The 2030 Agenda is based on human rights and gender equality, which are essential to sustainable development and key to creating an inclusive society for all, including women and girls with disabilities. For women and girls with disabilities, inequality goes beyond the problem of unequal access to buildings, development programs or services. Women and girls with disabilities are facing inequalities in all areas of their life and throughout their whole life cycle.

Women and girls with disabilities comprise 17 per cent of the world's female population; yet their issues have traditionally remained invisible both within the disability rights movements and the women's rights movements. Women and girls with disabilities experience multiple discriminations based on their gender and disability, as well as other characteristics. This places them at a higher risk of infringement of the enjoyment and exercise of all their rights — given the universal, interdependent and indivisible nature of human rights. In particular, they are subjected to gender based violence, sexual abuse, neglect, maltreatment, harassment and exploitation both within and outside the home, at school, in the workplace, in the community and when confined in institutions. This includes sexual violence, rape (including marital rape), forced marriage, female genital mutilation and other harmful practices. Women and girls with disabilities have consistently been the targets of harmful practices in efforts to hide, alleviate or 'correct' their disabilities and, to the extent of eliminating individuals with disabilities altogether, including taking measures concerning women with disabilities to prevent the birth of future children presumed to have disabilities. Girls with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to harmful practices exercised by their family or communities; new-born girls with disabilities are more likely to be murdered in different regions across the world for want of a family's capacity or willingness to take care of a child

considered to be a burden, and girls with disabilities are three to five times more likely to be sexually assaulted and raped than girls without disabilities.

Despite the grave nature of these violations, access to justice frequently remains out of reach for many women and girls with disabilities due to legal, attitudinal, communicational, informational and physical barriers, leaving them without access to justice, remedies or redress. In addition, it is recognized that there are numerous areas in which women and girls face inequalities, including education, employment, participation in political spheres and health care. These inequalities and discrimination lead women and girls with disabilities and their families to exclusion from society and often to situations of poverty and extreme poverty.

The 2030 Agenda is mandated to eliminate poverty, achieve sustainable economic growth for all and to address multiple forms of discrimination and vulnerability, without leaving anyone behind. Despite the strengths of the 2030 Agenda — in making commitments to empower persons with disabilities under a number of goals and targets — it has failed to draw attention to or include any reference to women and girls with disabilities under Goal 5 on Gender Equality. However The International Disability Alliance is confident that the overarching aim of the 2030 Agenda — to realize all goals and targets — will be achieved in accordance with human rights, through gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls (Preamble), including women and girls with disabilities.

To address inequalities faced by women and girls with disabilities, we must connect the 2030 Agenda with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Gender and disability are inextricably linked, yet the intersection between the two remains disconnected. Despite interconnectedness, disability and gender are generally viewed separately (in their own silos) from both a legal and policy perspective, and issues that crossover both are responded to separately rather than through a common approach. Therefore, Member States must ensure that the implementation of Goal 5 focuses on the most marginalized women and girls, including those with disabilities.

The implementation of the 2030 Agenda also must happen by establishing coherence within existing internationally recognized standards and commitments, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Therefore, in order to realize the inclusion and empowerment of women and girls with disabilities, we recommend that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities serve as a guiding document for implementing the 2030 Agenda. Fundamental to this intersection is ensuring women and girls with disabilities are included in the planning, implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda.

Recommendations:

The International Disability Alliance recommends that national and regional Sustainable Development Goals strategies are developed in an open, inclusive and participatory way by bringing governments and disabled persons organisations, including representatives of women with disabilities, together — in order to ensure their perspectives are included. Capacity-building and new institutional settings are required: decentralized local governments must work closely with disabled persons organisations to ensure the realization of the 2030 Agenda and to ensure that their rights are fully recognized.

A positive allocation of funds and financial resources for a participatory, transparent and inclusive implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals must be a prerequisite, including on local levels. Governments must prioritize investments that elevate barriers — institutional, attitudinal, communicational, physical — to participation in society, in particular for women and girls with disabilities. Member States must commit towards a transparent and participatory system for the definition of national indicators, as well as a broad disaggregation of data. This will be critical for ensuring no one is left behind, and to reach the furthest behind first in the national contextualization of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets. States must systematically collect data on women and girls with disabilities with respect to all government sectors and all rights, including discrimination, violence, sexual and reproductive health and rights, access to justice, and use of disaggregated data and results of studies to develop laws, policies, programmes, awareness-raising campaigns and training. Each of these must be directed to state actors, service providers, civil society and women's rights organisations, as well as to women and girls with disabilities and their families, to ensure the effective and meaningful participation of women and girls with disabilities in society.

Communication:

A roadmap for the communication and dissemination of information about the 2030 Agenda at national, sub-national and local levels, allowing for women and girls with disabilities to be aware and capable of follow up on progress on its implementation.

Member States must commit to accountability, follow-up and review at local, national, regional and global levels. We expect our Heads of State and Government to commit to establish inclusive national baselines, national data collection and management systems, participatory and inclusive monitoring and reporting mechanisms for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals as well as to agree to public, inclusive and participatory national review mechanisms.
