Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Nobel Laureate, Elie Wiesel said (and I quote), “This is the duty of our generation as we enter the twenty-first century — solidarity with the weak, the persecuted, the lonely, the sick, and those in despair. It is expressed by the desire to give a noble and humanizing meaning to a community in which all members will define themselves not by their own identity but by that of others.”

We as a “family of nations” are defined by the work we do to enable every person and every group to participate fully in society and create opportunities for them to fulfill their potential.

The Secretary-General’s report entitled “World Social Situation 2013: inequality matters” details the alarming increase in income and non-income inequality such as healthcare and education in many parts of the world.

Rising inequalities are not only a social issue in that they weaken societies, they also present serious constraints to economic growth. Certain social groups - such as women, youth, older persons, migrants and persons with disabilities are particularly disadvantaged by inequalities. Continuing to ignore and marginalize these groups will further widen the gap and ultimately erode society as a whole.

Today, I would like to focus on three topics in particular – persons with disabilities, youth and civil society.

Mr. Chairman,

Over 650 million people, or approximately 10 percent of the world’s population, now live with some form of disability.

The UN’s Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities demonstrates the international community’s commitment to enforcing the rights of persons with disabilities and promoting them around the world.

I'm proud of the progress that has been made since the Convention was ratified. Israel was active in the negotiations that led to the adoption of the Convention and is proud to serve as Vice Chair of the Conference of State Parties of the CRPD for 2013/14.

But there is much more to be done. In far too many places, there are significant gaps between policy and practice. Major international frameworks like the Millennium Development Goals have largely overlooked the rights of persons with disabilities.
The State of Israel remains committed to upholding the rights of persons with disabilities through legislation, legal protection, education and active partnerships between government and civil society.

Israel’s Commission for Equal Rights of Persons with Disabilities was established in 2000 with the aim of implementing a comprehensive equal rights law that was enacted two years earlier.

Addressing the many challenges faced by persons with disabilities requires not only the efforts of governments, but the full participation of persons with disabilities and their organizations. This is the reason that the Israeli equal rights law created an Advisory Committee to the Commission on Equal Rights comprised of persons with disabilities, members of civil society and other professionals.

Mr. Chairman,

More than half the earth’s people are under the age of 25. These are young people who want to be full contributors to their families, their communities and their nations. They are looking for our help in defining a role for themselves in the world that includes dignity and respect.

And it is our duty to help them. No matter the issue being addressed – whether it be combatting disease, promoting education or expanding financing for entrepreneurs - the support and engagement of young people is critical for long-term, sustainable development.

Time and again, we have seen that youth have been at the forefront of innovating and envisioning new worlds of possibilities. When given the right opportunities and resources they can become the strongest supporters of strong societies and prosperous economies.

Israel is a leader in developing programs aimed at integrating youth into society. Over the past 20 years, Israel has also developed a comprehensive approach to respond to the needs of at-risk youth through major advances in legislation and increased public awareness.

Mr. Chairman,

The problems and challenges faced by nations are too complex for governments to solve alone. Civil society fills in the gaps, working toward a common purpose while fighting for human rights and dignity. It holds governments accountable, keeps them honest, and helps them work more effectively.

Real and lasting change is only possible if we work with all partners, governments, the private sector, and civil society. Members of civil society have tremendous expertise and we should ensure that they have opportunities to make valuable contributions.

Mr. Chairman,

Together, let us recommit to building a world free of barriers; a world full of understanding; and, a world that provides opportunities for every person.