Item 69(a) Implementation of Human Rights Instruments
Disabilities statement

Statement by H.E. Jim McLay
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Mr Chairman, a fully inclusive society is one that recognises and values persons with disabilities as equal participants; and so it is that New Zealand takes this opportunity to reaffirm its full and unwavering commitment to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The Convention provides that persons with disabilities are entitled to live a life of prosperity and dignity, and fully and continually to participate in society on an equal basis with others.

We believe that the effective implementation of this Convention is imperative in truly protecting and fulfilling the rights of the 1 billion persons with disabilities world-wide.

Mr Chairman, New Zealand welcomes the continually increasing ratification of the CRPD, now standing at 138 Parties. This reflects a truly global commitment to respect, protect and fulfill the rights of persons with disabilities — a commitment we must continue to champion as we embrace a new, more inclusive era for persons with disabilities.

We therefore take this opportunity to call on States who have not yet done so to ratify and implement the CRPD.

When the Convention was being negotiated, it was said many times that there can be "nothing about us without us". New Zealand agrees, and, in this vein, repeats that persons with disabilities must always have the opportunities to participate in all policy- and decision-making, but especially that which directly affects them.

Mr Chairman, many persons with disabilities are unable to reach their potential or participate fully in the community because they face barriers to doing even the simplest things — things that many people take for granted — barriers ranging from the purely physical, such as access to facilities, to the attitudinal, due to poor awareness of disability issues and of the capacity and potential of persons with disabilities.

Those barriers are created when we build a society that takes no account of the impairments other people have, a society that assumes we can all see signs, read directions, hear announcements, reach buttons, have the strength to open heavy doors and have stable moods and perceptions.

The key to a truly inclusive society is not to provide persons with disabilities with special conditions, but to provide them with the same opportunities as everyone else.

Mr Chairman, New Zealand welcomes the Outcome Document of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on Disability and Development, held in September this year. But it's important that we view the high level meeting as the start of a process, not the completion.
The Outcome Document provides States with a roadmap for a disability inclusive development agenda, and our success in delivering on that agenda will be measured by our actions.

It is important that we take stock of both the successes and failures of the Millennium Development Goal for persons with disabilities; all the more so as we look forward to a new global sustainable development agenda, ever mindful of our duty of international cooperation under Article 32 of the Convention.

New Zealand has already told the SDGs Working Group of our strongly held view that the respect, protection and fulfillment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, without discrimination on any ground, must be the basis of the post-2015 development agenda.

It must be rooted in principles of equality, equity and social justice for all, so that “no one is left behind”.

We reiterate that view today.

Mr Chairman, New Zealand recognises persons with disabilities as both agents and beneficiaries of development, and acknowledges the value of their contribution for the general well-being, progress and diversity of society. That’s why New Zealand regards the rights and participation of persons with disabilities as an essential component of disaster risk reduction, humanitarian action and emergency contingency planning.

The Canterbury earthquakes of 2010 and 2011 have had a devastating impact on the people of Canterbury, including New Zealand’s second largest city, Christchurch. As we rebuild and recover from this disaster, we are making our emergency preparedness services more responsive to persons with disabilities, and we will have many lessons to share, both positive and negative.

Mr Chairman, we cannot manage what we can’t measure. So it’s important that we have good statistical data, both aggregated and disaggregated, focused on aspects such as location, gender, disability impairment and ethnicity. This is an area where we member states and the UN system can definitely do better.

For its part, New Zealand conducts a national Disability Survey in conjunction with every five yearly census – a survey that collects information on persons with disabilities, providing an accurate picture of how many disabled people live in New Zealand, as well as the nature, duration, and cause of their impairments; a survey that is currently the most comprehensive source of data on persons with disabilities in New Zealand.

When New Zealand was developing its disability strategy in 2000 it was said “disability is in society, not in me” – a timely reminder, Mr Chairman, that we all have a part to play in realising the rights of all persons with disabilities.