**CRPD Day of General Discussion on the Right to Education of Persons with Disabilities**

**Geneva, Switzerland – 15 April, 2015**

Speech delivered in the *Interactive panel on support for inclusion in the general education system and individualized support measures* (5 m 20 s)

Good afternoon,

In the few minutes I have this afternoon to address you on the issue of Inclusive Education, I would like to start by further stressing the words of Ms. Catalina Devandas, the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities. While it is true that we need to further clarify the concept of inclusive education, this concept is not new. Even before the discussions that lead to the Salamanca Statement, inclusive education was a topic of discussion. At some point we have to stop discussing and move onto action that is decisive, holistic and transformative.

Although I am sitting among friends and colleagues who are also persons with disabilities, I would like to stress that inclusive education is not JUST about children with disabilities. Rather, it is about quality education for ALL children, INCLUDING children with disabilities. And, certainly, inclusive education is NOT integration nor is it mainstreaming. We have spent the last 25 years discussing legislative and policy reform as well as states’ responsibilities towards children with disabilities. The reality is that even countries that have exemplary inclusive regulatory frameworks face challenges in implementation that often perpetuate segregation.

Again, calling on Ms. Devandas words, what is needed is clear, concise and practical guidance on the implementation of Article 24. And, to accomplish any further movement, I would go a bit further and specify that what we need is to empowered the front line of education – teachers and children – to implement inclusive education.

Inclusive education includes many things. But, inclusive education will not be realized, unless those who work in the classroom believe in, and are empowered to, enact it. Inclusive education is, at its core, good teaching for all. Therefore, practical guidance needs to focus on the benefits, attitudes, knowledge and skills of teachers for ALL children.

FIRST, not everyone can be a teacher. Investing in teacher education is ultimately investing in a country that is richer in both social and cultural capital. Practical guidance should ensure that pre-service institutions seek, retain and mentor exceptional citizens that believe in the right of ALL children to education.

SECOND, attitudes are informed by personal beliefs. Social change is the responsibility of all of us but, in education, it is the responsibility of teachers – who set the standard of acceptable behaviors. The right of a child to quality education should not be compromised and teachers (and other children) are at the forefront of social change. We must provide them with the space and resources to do what’s right.

THIRD, knowledge must be freely shared if inclusive education is to be realized. We have spent close to a century preparing teachers to work in silos, all in the name of specialized professions. If specialized teaching worked, we would not be here today. While there is a space and a need for specialized knowledge this is not often transferable to the general classroom. We must aim to provide teachers with the necessary knowledge (and related skills) that leads to their ability to differentiate instruction, responding to students’ strengths and building upon their dreams and aspirations. In all cases of successful inclusive practices, the empowerment of teachers to work creatively, cooperatively and in child-centered ways is at the center of the success. This is a fact often overlooked.

Inclusive education is not about fitting a child with a disability to mainstream schools. Inclusive education requires the creation of classrooms, schools and systems that are responsive to children and adapt to their strengths and aspirations. Universal Design for Learning, Differentiated Instruction, Cooperative Teaching and learning, positive behavior management, multi-disciplinary team-building and decision-making, ICTs and assistive technologies, are all important elements of inclusive education. But inclusive education is not an add-on to existing systems. It requires the involvement and full participation of teachers and children themselves, without which we will continue to fall short in realizing Article 24.

Thank you.