**Remarks of Prof. Sébastien Jodoin to be delivered at the Panel discussion on the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of climate change on 8 July 2020**

Mme la Présidente du Conseil des droits humains des Nations Unies,

Madame la Haute Commissaire des Nations unies aux droits humains,

Excellences,

Distingués panelistes et chers invités,

C’est un grand honneur pour moi de participer à ce panel aujourd’hui en tant que chercheur vivant avec un handicap. D’emblée, je tiens à remercier les nombreux activistes et chercheurs au sein du mouvement des droits des personnes handicapées pour leur accueil, leur soutien et leur précieuse collaboration dans les projets que je mène sur la relation entre les droits des personnes handicapées et la justice climatique.

In my presentation, I will emphasize four points that are fundamental to applying a disability rights approach for understanding and addressing climate change.

As is clear from the analytical study produced by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, climate change has disproportionate impacts for disabled persons and threatens their basic human rights.

I want to stress to the Council that a disability rights lens recognizes that that the greater vulnerability of persons with disabilities to the consequences of climate change ultimately stems from the multiple economic, social, and political barriers that hinder their full participation in society. Persons with disabilities are typically among the most marginalized within a community and face disparate access to education, healthcare, employment, transportation, and other basic goods and services. Their rights and perspectives are often neglected in the design of climate adaptation and disaster response efforts. As a result, due to the inaccessibility of emergency communications, relief, and recovery efforts, disabled persons experience disproportionately high rates of mortality during severe weather events fuelled by climate change, such as cyclones, floods, or heatwaves. These challenges are felt most acutely by populations in developing countries as well as segments of the population that are affected by intersecting forms of systemic discrimination, such as women, ethnic minorities, Indigenous Peoples, children, and the elderly.

Accordiongly, states are obliged to adopt and implement climate mitigation and adaptation measures that can effectively prevent and minimize the impacts of climate change for disabled persons. This obligation extends to the international realm and requires that states prioritize disability rights in their multilateral and bilateral climate finance and assistance programmes. More broadly, under international law as well as the majority of the world’s domestic legal systems, governments are required to respect, protect, and fulfil disability rights in the development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of climate policies and programs.

In doing so, states must ensure that climate actions foster the dignity of persons with disabilities and addresses, rather than reinforces, existing social inequities. For instance, while the development of mass transit systems is key to reducing carbon emissions from automobiles in many parts of the world, they are often inaccessible to persons with physical mobility and visual impairments. Another striking example of the exclusion of the disability community can be found in the multilateral climate negotiations themselves. Despite the clear obligations of states to engage persons with disabilities and promote their rights internationally, the disability community does not currently have a constituency that enables it to participate in UNFCCC processes, unlike women, children and youth, or Indigenous Peoples. The creation of a constituency for persons with disabilities under the UNFCCC is, in my view, a clear obligation that flows from the UN disability rights convention and I would urge the Council and its members to support its establishment.

By empowering disabled persons and meaningfully including their rights, ideas, and perspectives, a disability rights approach has the potential to generate climate solutions that resonate with a greater share of the population. Potential examples of climate measures that are more inclusive and more effective are easy to find. Ensuring that mass transit systems are accessible is not only an obligation owed to persons with physical mobility impairments, but also benefits a wide range of users. Likewise, the creation of accessible early warning systems can also benefit the broader population, as such systems can more effectively warn people with, and without disabilities, of impending danger.

Finally, I want to emphasize that persons with disabilities should be recognized as agents that can make valuable contributions to the world’s efforts to reach carbon neutrality and adapt to our changing planet. Disabled persons are experts in resilience and innovation – we are constantly having to find solutions to thrive in a world that has not been designed with us in mind. As societies around the world confront, and are affected by, the climate crisis, it is vital that they do so in collaboration with disabled persons, with a view to co-producing a safe climate and an inclusive future for all.

Thank you.