**Statement by the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities**

**United Nations Security Council - Arria formula** **meeting on persons with disabilities in armed conflicts**

**3 December 2018**

Excellences,

Dear delegates, colleagues and friends,

Greetings from Kuwait where I am conducting an official country visit. I would like to start recognising the initiative of Poland with the support of Kuwait, Peru, Ivory Coast and Germany to hold this first ever Arria formula meeting on persons with disabilities in armed conflicts. This is particularly relevant as today we mark the international day of persons with disabilities.

As you know, persons with disabilities experience extreme conditions in armed conflicts. They are unable to escape war or find adequate shelter, they face higher death rates and are systematically exposed to discrimination, abuse and violence.

Despite this reality, persons with disabilities encounter major challenges in benefiting from civilian protection and humanitarian responses, including:

* Significant accessibility barriers to access safety measures and humanitarian assistance,
* Absence of disability-related support and services, and
* Lack of awareness and training of those in charge of peacekeeping operations and humanitarian action.

Although it is clear that all parties to armed conflicts have obligations under international humanitarian law to facilitate the protection and safety of persons with disabilities, these high-level political commitments are yet to be transformed into concrete actions.

In this regard, I would like stress three areas that deserve priority action:

First, **ensuring disability-disaggregated data collection**. Consistent data collection on the situation of persons with disabilities is required to better understand and address challenges in peacekeeping and humanitarian action, as well as to evaluate the actual impact of existing efforts.

Second, **mainstreaming disability in all UN peace operations and humanitarian responses**. As anyone else, persons with disabilities require civilian protection and assistance in situations of armed conflict and humanitarian emergencies. The lack of consideration of this group in such contexts has a disproportionate impact on their survival rates and their access to the needed humanitarian assistance.

Third, **improving accountability within the United Nations system**. The United Nations should systematically report on progress made in the inclusion of persons with disabilities in its efforts in the area of civilian protection and humanitarian responses. As of today, there is little evidence of how or if the needs of persons with disabilities are being considered in the design and implementation of UN efforts in this area. As you know, earlier this year the UN Secretary-General’s Executive Committee took the important decision to promote a system-wide approach to advance disability inclusion in UN’s work. I am confident that this decision will promote the needed action across all the organization’s pillars, including in the area of peace and security.

Excellences, delegates, colleagues and friends,

Some solutions for the protection of our group will come from the Inter-Agency Standing Committee on the CRPD’s guidelines on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian action. Nevertheless, little will be achieved unless there is high-level support to include disability among the priorities of the humanitarian system.

I would also like to encourage the UN Security Council to actively engage in the protection of persons with disabilities in armed conflict and other situations of risk. The Council could consider, for example, holding open debates on the situation of persons with disabilities; incorporating persons with disabilities in its briefing and reporting on civilian protection; and keeping abreast of the situation of persons with disabilities in armed conflict as a standing agenda item.

A clear message from the Council will make the difference for the lives and security of millions of persons with disabilities.

I thank you.

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