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**STATEMENT BY MS. HEBA HAGRASS,
UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL RAPPOREUR
ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

Seventeenth Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the
Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Opening remarks

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Mister President,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates and participants,

It is my honour to address you today for the first time as the new United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities.

I wish to thank the Bureau for the invitation to participate in the opening of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Allow me at the outset to pay tribute to my two predecessors – Catalina Devandas Aguilar and Gerard Quinn. Their work was truly inspiring and pioneering.

As this year marks the 10th anniversary of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, I am proud to carry on and build on their achievements over the past decade.

Looking back, I do see a positive trend of the rights of persons with disabilities being more included in debates on global issues where the disability perspective was near to invisible.

For instance, in disaster risk reduction, protection of civilians in situations of armed conflict, as well as building systemic disability inclusion across the UN system. A lot remains to be done, especially given the global challenges of armed conflicts, climate change, and the economic crisis.

Looking ahead, the world is rapidly changing on many fronts. This creates both opportunities and risks for the protection and exercise of the rights of persons with disabilities in line with the CRPD or whether they will result in setbacks and exclusion.

The rapid development of new technologies including artificial intelligence can be a gamechanger for the rights persons with disabilities. But only if they are included in their design and regulation to prevent discriminatory effects.

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed gaps and weaknesses in care and support systems in all regions of the world. If we are truly committed to ensuring community inclusion and independent living for persons with disabilities, then significant investments into disability-inclusive care and support systems are needed.

Much of my future thematic work will focus on transformative and systemic changes. Naturally, I see the close links between the CRPD and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which are mutually reinforcing and complementary. And in the spirit of leaving no one behind, I will be particularly attentive to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, as experienced for instance by women and girls with disabilities.

My first report to the General Assembly later this year will address the inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities in SDGs and related discussions. I am particularly committed to raising the disability perspective in processes linked to accelerating the implementation of the Sustainable Development Agenda and efforts to bring transformative action for the future of humanity.

Here I look with hope to this year's Summit of the Future and next year's Social Summit as opportunities to strengthen human rights protection in general and especially for persons with disabilities. I particularly urge States to meaningfully consult persons with disabilities and commit to concrete actions to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs for persons with disabilities.

I look forward to your deliberations and to the wide array of side-events on the broad range of topics. I am eager to engage with many of you over the next few days and in the future and look forward to our fruitful interactions.

I thank you.

[ENDS]