



Statement by His Excellency Ivan Jurkovič  
Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other International  
Organizations in Geneva  
at the 34<sup>th</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council  
- Item 3 - Special Rapporteurs on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities  
3<sup>rd</sup> March 2017

Mr. President,

My Delegation is grateful for the Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which noted that, according to estimates of the World Health Organization, persons with disabilities constitute 15 per cent of the world population<sup>1</sup>. Thus, more than one billion people, including children, are estimated to be living with a disability<sup>2</sup>.

A very significant fact to be recognized is that 1 in 5 of the world's poorest people lives with a disability, which, in itself, could constitute both a cause and an effect of poverty. In today's world, people with disabilities and their families experience more economic and social disadvantage than those without disability, either in developed and developing countries. Therefore, "disability also is a development issue, because of its bidirectional link to poverty: disability may increase the risk of poverty, and poverty may increase the risk of disability"<sup>3</sup>. The International Community faces a double challenge in its efforts to confront this reality. It needs to provide care and support for persons with disabilities and to work toward the elimination of social and economic inequalities that cause poverty. All such action must be oriented toward a broader goal: the promotion of human dignity.

Protecting the human rights and dignity of persons with disabilities has always been a major concern for the Holy See, which "has consistently called for disabled

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<sup>1</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> World Health Organization (WHO) and World Bank, *World Report on Disability 2011*, p. 29.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

individuals to be completely and compassionately integrated into society, convinced that they possess full and inalienable human rights”<sup>4</sup> “since the quality of a society is measured by the respect it has for the weakest of its members”<sup>5</sup>.

The Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has focused her Report on the need to ensure access to different forms of support for persons with disabilities, in order to defeat unequal treatment, “since the support services represent a significant cost for persons with disabilities, preventing them from climbing out of poverty”. Persons with disabilities represent an invaluable worth since they help us to see more clearly the dignity and greatness of the human persons. Unfortunately, they are too often subjected to discrimination and usually slip into poverty.

Mr. President,

In an ever-changing world, we regrettably have “created a ‘throw away’ culture which is now spreading”<sup>6</sup>, which is at the root of discrimination against persons with disabilities, who often are perceived as a ‘burdens’ or as ‘passive objects’. We have to work in order to overcome a lifestyle which excludes those who are considered to be less than “fully functional”. The promotion of human dignity requires the recognition that all persons possess inalienable rights which cannot be ignored or denied, much less for the sake of individualistic or economic interests. To achieve this aim, we must begin at the local level, with the solidarity of the family members and those close to persons with disabilities. Indeed, “‘taking care of one another’ becomes a foundation of human life and a moral attitude to foster, through the values of commitment and solidarity”<sup>7</sup>. Along this line, the Special Rapporteur has stated that “support is a normal part of community life, with families serving as the first source of support for everyone. For many persons with disabilities, family support serves as a bridge to access other assistance needed to enjoy fully their human rights”<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Intervention by H.E. Msgr. Celestino Migliore, at the 76<sup>th</sup> plenary meeting of the General Assembly of the United Nations on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, 13 December 2006, New York.

<sup>5</sup> Pope John Paul II, Liturgical Celebration to the Jubilee of the Communities with Persons with a Disabilities, 31 March 1984.

<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, N. 53.

<sup>7</sup> Pope Francis, Message to Participants in the General Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life on the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of its founding, 19 February 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, p. 6.

Mr. President,

“Authentic human development [and, even more, an inclusive development] has a moral character. It presumes full respect for the human person”<sup>9</sup>.

States have the great duty to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels” (SDG 16). To reduce disadvantages and create an inclusive society, every State “must establish legal and policy frameworks that ensure that support services and arrangements, are available, accessible, adequate and affordable. [...] States should take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social, educational and other measures to protect persons with disabilities [...] (and) consider integrating as many assistance and support services as possible into their existing mainstream policies and programmes.”<sup>10</sup>.

In conclusion, Mr. President,

Pope Francis often has addressed his attention and advocacy on behalf of persons with disabilities and for all persons on the margins of society. Furthermore, he calls for a strong commitment by States themselves, saying that care for “those in need takes strength and tenderness, effort and generosity in the midst of a functionalistic and privatized mindset which inexorably leads to a ‘throwaway culture’ ... [It] means protecting memory and hope; it means taking responsibility for the present with its situations of utter marginalization and anguish, and being capable of bestowing dignity upon it”<sup>11</sup>. A sense of comprehensive responsibility is indeed vital to protect the human dignity of each person and to ensure that persons with disabilities participate effectively and firsthand in the political, social and development processes of their societies.

Thank you, Mr. President.

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<sup>9</sup> Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si*, N. 5.

<sup>10</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, p. 14.

<sup>11</sup> Pope Francis, Address to the European Parliament, Strasbourg, 25 November 2014.