

Statement by

Ms. Hawla Ahmed Didi

Deputy Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of the Republic of the Maldives to the United Nations and other International Organisations at Geneva

Annual Debate on Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Theme: Support systems to ensure the community inclusion of persons with disabilities, including as a means of building forward better after the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic

52nd Session of the Human Rights Council

13 March 2023

Thank you, Mr. President,

The Maldives thanks the panelists for their insightful contributions on the important theme of “community inclusion of persons with disabilities as a means of building forward better, after the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.” We recognize that the pandemic significantly affected lives of people with disabilities by exacerbating existing inequalities related to adverse socioeconomic outcomes. The Maldives believes that an inclusive society is the key to sustainable development, and we continuously strive to strengthen policies and procedures to ensure that persons with disabilities are fully integrated into the society.

Mr. President,

The Government of Maldives, in its efforts to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities, launched the National Disability Registry in 2023, as required under the Disabilities Act. The data collected through the registry has made it easier for the Government to cater for the specific needs and requirements of persons with

disabilities. Under the Disability Act, the National Disability Classification is also being implemented. In 2019, the Government began providing financial assistance to therapeutic services needed for persons with disabilities. The social protection mechanisms also provide financial coverage for Assistive Devices. In addition, work is underway to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

To address the challenges in accessing public information and to improve information access by people with disabilities, a local NGO, in partnership with the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Community Empowerment and the Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services, together with the support from UNDP, has developed an app to assist visually impaired persons to read digital text in the local language. This app enabled access to timely and accurate information related to the pandemic and other social conditions.

Furthermore, in 2022, the Maldives opened the world's first accessibility and inclusion certified resort, committing to 'total guest inclusion' with many accessible features, including light-up phones for the hearing impaired, alert system for the deaf and sensory experiences for the visually impaired.

The Maldives remains committed to raise awareness and foster an inclusive society by protecting and promoting the rights of persons with disabilities and upholding the obligations of the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. In conclusion, I would like to ask the Panel, "as we recover from the pandemic, how can workplaces properly recognize and value the contribution of people with disabilities?"

I thank you.