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Statement submitted by International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/2011/100.

Statement***The Imperative for the Inclusion of Children with Disabilities covering Millennium Development Goal 2: Universal Access to Education by 2015**

Over the past decade the United Nations and its member organizations have made impressive progress towards achieving Goal 2 “universal access to education” through the Education For All — Fast Track Initiative. Today, millions of children in the developing world have access to their right to education for the first time. However, for children with disabilities and their families the reality has been entirely different. For these families it is most likely that their disabled child remains at home with no access to education, resulting in an increased economic burden on the family that almost certainly condemns the disabled child to a life of poverty and illiteracy. This is a situation that must be addressed if Education For All is really to be for all. In 2003, the Executive Committee of the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment expressed concern and a determination to change this situation for the more than 4 million visually impaired children in the developing world that today have no access to education.

The International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment systematically examined the root causes of this serious inequity and developed a “Global campaign on education for all children with visual impairment” that was launched in mid-2006 and involves the World Blind Union, 12 international non-governmental agencies working in the fields of blindness prevention, education and rehabilitation and Governments of the 11 countries where this initiative is now under way. Data from 7 of these 11 focus countries indicates that during a period of just 24 months more than 32,000 visually impaired children were enrolled in community schools, most for the very first time.

While we are pleased with these initial results, we are far from being satisfied with the plight of the millions of visually impaired and other disabled children for whom the right to education remains only an elusive dream. The International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment feels strongly that if Goal 2 is to be achieved and article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is to be moved from intention to reality, the United Nations, its member organizations, national Governments, disabled persons’ organizations and the NGO community must focus concentrated efforts on addressing, within the Education For All — Fast-Track Initiative, the educational needs of children with disabilities to: (a) assure that the needs of disabled children are reflected in all Education For All national plans; (b) encourage and support capacity-building programmes for specialized and regular classroom teachers and other human resources; (c) assure that educational services are inclusive of all children with disabilities; and (d) provide textbooks and other educational materials that are fully accessible to the learning needs of the child.

Goal 2 can only be achieved if the needs of children with disabilities and their families are immediately given high priority.

The time has come for the United Nations, the Education For All — Fast Track

* The present statement is being issued without formal editing.

Initiative and Governments of all countries to address the serious discrepancy that exists between the rates of access to education for disabled and non-disabled children.

The International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment stands ready to share its experience with Governments and United Nations member organizations. Working together we feel confident that the needs of all disabled children can be effectively addressed, making “Education For All” truly for all.
