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**High-level segment: annual ministerial review**

### **Statement submitted by World Blind Union, 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.

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\* E/2012/100.



## Statement

Persons with disabilities constitute one of the most excluded and densely marginalized sections of the society, with very low economic and social outcomes. According to the *World Report on Disability 2011*, persons with disabilities, in general, and blind or partially sighted persons, in particular, have significantly low employment and high unemployment rates as compared to people without disabilities. The employment ratios range from lows of 30 per cent in South Africa and 38 per cent in Japan to highs of 81 per cent in Switzerland and 92 per cent in Malawi. The survey conducted by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 51 countries reveals that the employment rate is 52.8 per cent for men and 19.6 per cent for women with disabilities as against 64.9 per cent for men and 29.9 per cent for women without disabilities. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development study on working-age individuals in 27 countries, analysis shows that the employment rate of persons with disabilities is 44 per cent as against 75 per cent for persons without disabilities. The rate of non-participation is 49 per cent as against 20 per cent, which is two to five times higher than that of non-disabled working-age persons.

Blind and partially sighted persons are a distinct group within the disabled community who often face multiple factors of marginalization owing to the kind of impairment and barriers they encounter. According to WHO, there are 285 million persons who are blind or partially sighted. A total of 80 per cent live in developing countries and 82 per cent of them experience chronic poverty conditions. The World Bank estimates that 20 per cent of the poorest of the poor in the world are blind or partially sighted, in particular, and persons with disabilities, in general. It goes without saying that blind and partially sighted persons have significantly lower employment and higher unemployment rates compared to other categories of impairment. Unemployment rates are five times higher among blind or partially sighted persons and two times higher among persons in other disability categories as against those without disabilities. A total of 50 per cent of working-age blind persons in the United States of America are unemployed. According to various studies, the employment rates of blind and partially sighted persons are 25 per cent in developed countries and 10 per cent in developing countries.

Crippling negative attitudes, institutional and structural barriers, compounded by chronic poverty; inadequate access to higher/professional/technical/vocational education and to capital and infrastructure; ineffective schemes, policies and programmes of the State; lack of possession of productive assets; and poor health outcomes and participation significantly contribute to dehumanization and degradation in the societies where they live. Livelihood is the key to empowerment and to promote the dignity of an individual. The above-stated situation of blind and partially sighted persons with regard to work, employment and livelihood exacerbates the living conditions and hinders full participation through systematic and forced exclusion and denial of rights.

Internationally agreed goals and targets, more particularly the Millennium Development Goals, will not and cannot be completely achieved without addressing the livelihood issues of blind and partially sighted persons at all levels. Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities mandates both States parties and private entities to take appropriate measures to promote the employability, skill development and productivity and livelihood options of persons

with disabilities, in general, and of blind and partially sighted persons, in particular, through access to training, education, capital and employment opportunities. Access to gainful and meaningful means of livelihood significantly contributes in reducing chronic poverty and enhances the participation, bargaining power, productivity and dignity of blind and partially sighted persons.

As articulated in article 27 (1) of the Convention, concerning work and employment, the World Blind Union affirms the right of persons with disabilities, in particular blind and partially sighted persons, to work, on an equal basis with others, including the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities. Thus, the World Blind Union calls upon all the relevant stakeholders to ensure effective and full participation of blind and partially sighted persons in the labour market through the following strategic interventions:

- Carry out massive mass education and awareness-generation initiatives by Government, media, fraternity, civil society and corporate agencies to uproot the myths, misconceptions, wrong beliefs and notions among employers about the capabilities, potential and productivity of blind and partially sighted persons, the cost of investment and the fear of blindness by projecting appropriate and adequate role models
- Initiate appropriate legislative and administrative measures to end discrimination against blind and partially sighted persons on the basis of impairment in accessing training, education, capital, equal wages, technology, assistive devices and technology, and employment opportunities across sectors
- Take appropriate and adequate affirmative actions to promote employability, skill development and livelihood opportunities for blind and partially sighted persons across sectors through appropriate policies, affirmative actions, incentives and specific initiatives
- Promote the greater participation of civil society and corporate agencies in providing work, employment and livelihood opportunities for blind and partially sighted persons where the role of the State is shrinking and avenues of employment in the public sector are drastically reduced as a result of rapid globalization, privatization and liberalization in the larger labour markets of the world
- Ensure effective implementation of quota systems in education, employment, poverty alleviation schemes and programmes for blind and partially sighted persons by States parties and the private sector to secure appropriate means of livelihood
- Carry out appropriate and adequate affirmative actions to promote self-employment ventures among blind and partially sighted persons by developing business management skills, reservations, incentives and access to capital for business ventures
- Improve access to assistive devices and technology, comprehensive packages of rehabilitation programmes, accessible work environments, accessible transport, information in accessible formats and personality development through specific strategies in coordination with multiple stakeholders

- Promote effective international cooperation among countries, civil society and corporate agencies and bilateral and multilateral agencies for enhancing the active participation of blind and partially sighted persons in the labour market, economic activities and development actions and processes
- Ensure statutory and legal compliance of multinational corporations in the developing world, as applicable in their own countries, in promoting the livelihood of blind and partially sighted persons
- Ensure that States parties, in cooperation with the private sector, take appropriate and adequate measures to achieve social security and protection of blind and partially sighted persons in accordance with article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in order to attain a decent and adequate standard of living

The World Blind Union is happy to extend appropriate and specific support to any of the major stakeholders of the development through our national member organizations, partners and expert team to make the inclusion of blind and partially sighted persons a reality.

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