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Statement submitted by Jamaican Association on Mental Retardation, 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/2012/100.



Statement

A number of initiatives have been introduced over the years to promote and strengthen the productive capacity of young adults with disabilities. These have facilitated effective transitioning from school into meaningful employment, but some have not been sustained. Non-governmental organizations, in partnership with the Government of Jamaica through the Ministry of Education, have provided education and training at the secondary level through formal special education and integrated environments. Significant investment through the non-governmental organization community and the Government has been made to facilitate vocational training and work experience initiatives. These have served to raise the community's awareness of the capacity of persons with disabilities to engage in meaningful work.

However, a gap exists in the accessibility of post-secondary training and work options for specific groups of persons, primarily those with intellectual disabilities. Post-secondary training options are extremely limited and largely concentrated in Kingston. Partnerships with the National Training Agency through its community-based interventions department have also provided some support in the Kingston metropolitan area. These programmes, limited in scope and relevance, also lack the geographic reach to provide meaningful options to clients in rural areas.

In any given year, more than 70 per cent of the young adults with intellectual disabilities who exit formal secondary education programmes are trapped in an environment of inactivity where they experience intense poverty and a state of learned helplessness. Fewer than 20 per cent of these graduates are involved in employment options in competitive or family-related environments or in the three sheltered workshops located in two parishes. Post-secondary training is offered at one institution specific to persons with disabilities and in other inclusive programmes operated by community agencies. However, these programmes are primarily available to persons with intellectual disabilities at the high-functioning level.

Jamaica's National Development Plan (Vision 2030) contains a comprehensive disability subsector plan that highlights the various ways in which persons with disabilities are recognized and protected under the social protection system, in addition to strategies that should be in place for persons with disabilities by 2030. However, persons with intellectual disabilities represent a unique subgroup of the disability sector who will need a wide range of programmes to effectively meet their varied needs. This is currently not clearly articulated in the plan.

Persons with intellectual disabilities have a right to be included in mainstream life. The proposed legislative changes to encourage employment of persons with disabilities now need to be enacted. Enforceable policies aimed at improving employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, supported by sanctions and incentives, will make significant inroads in addressing poverty reduction. In addition, major cultural changes must now take place in society to remove discrimination against persons with intellectual disabilities to ensure that, once again, they are not left behind but enjoy full inclusion and participation.