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Statement submitted by Global Alliance on Accessible Technologies and Environments, 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.



Statement

With the high-level segment focusing on “Science, technology and innovation, and the potential of culture, for promoting sustainable development and achieving the Millennium Development Goals”, it is imperative to recognize that universal design is an integral component not only of sustainable development, but also for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. While universal design focuses on the design of environments and products to meet the changing needs of all people, sustainable development looks to designing environments and products that can change to meet the changing needs and roles of the environment or product, a subtle difference.

Universal design and accessibility of information and communications technology is an integral component of continued sustainable development in the fields of science and technology. Innovative and accessible technologies are equalizing factors that enable people with disabilities to obtain an education, achieve meaningful employment and participate in the community as contributing members of society. Similarly, universal design of the built environment and the public realm enables the participation of all. Without the realization of equal access to the built environment and information, States parties, Governments and private organizations cannot fully reach the Goals and the global potential of increased productivity, industrialization, economic growth and the creation of decent jobs for everyone, including for persons with disabilities.

The programmes of the Goals was designed to reduce poverty and increase levels of education and employment, yet inadvertently denied these opportunities to the world’s one billion persons with a disability, accounting for 10 to 15 per cent of the world’s population.

Since the introduction of the Goals, The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was adopted on 13 December 2006 and presently has 155 signatories and 130 ratifications. This seminal document addresses the rights of persons with disabilities to enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the sustainable development of science and technologies.

Access to universally designed and sustainably developed built environments, including transportation systems, are outlined in article 9 of the Convention. Article 11 addresses access to information, including the development and sharing of information in alternate formats and the development of low-cost and affordable assistive and adaptive technologies for less developed countries.

The development of universally designed and accessible information and communications technology and an accessible built environment can be encouraged by States parties, governmental agencies and the private sector through the use of mandatory accessible procurement policies, thereby creating sufficient demand for companies to further develop technologies and environments that are accessible for everyone.

In order for there to truly be sustainable development of science and technology in relation to achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, there must be the full inclusion of persons with disabilities and explicit reference to the requirement of achieving the global implementation of the Convention.