Opening Statement
by
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Your Excellency, Mr. Lv Shiming, Vice-Chairperson, China Disabled Persons’ Federation,
Ms. Abia Akram, Co-Chair, Asia-Pacific Women with Disabilities United,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Dear Friends and Colleagues in the Disability Community,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of UNESCAP, it is my pleasure to welcome you all to the Senior Officials Segment of the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting on the Midpoint Review of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013-2022.

ESCAP is deeply grateful to the Government of China for its generous hosting of this historic meeting. Permit me, Your Excellency Mr Lv Shiming, to convey through you, ESCAP’s sincere appreciation of the hard work and wonderful cooperation of all colleagues in China Disabled Persons’ Federation (CDPF) in preparations for this meeting.

I warmly thank civil society stakeholders, including persons with disabilities, for your active engagement in the preparatory process in the past year.
I also thank our partners in the UN system, other international organizations and eminent experts in the field of disability-inclusive development, for contributing technical expertise to the substantive preparations.

**Historical background to the meeting:**

Looking back over the past two and a half decades, we see that the Asia-Pacific region has demonstrated significant leadership in promoting the rights of persons with disabilities.

It was in this historic city of Beijing, twenty-five years ago, that the world’s first regional decade of persons with disabilities, 1993-2002, was proclaimed, with the theme of full participation and equality.

Fifteen years ago, on the shores of Lake Biwa in Japan, the ESCAP member States launched in Otsu the second Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, from 2003 to 2012.

Five years ago, in Incheon, Republic of Korea, member States adopted the landmark Incheon Strategy to Make the Right Real for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific.

Today, we have come full circle—we are back in Beijing where it all began. We are at the midpoint of the current Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013-2022 as well as the Incheon Strategy.

The Incheon Strategy gave the world, its first set of regionally agreed, time-bound, disability-specific development goals. Over the last five years, ESCAP has pioneered the collection of the first-ever regional baseline-data on disability which has an immense potential to enhance evidence-based policy making in the region.

In the meantime, we must recognize that the current Asian and Pacific decade for Persons with Disabilities functions amidst the empowering and disability-inclusive development paradigm of Sustainable Development. By harnessing the synergies between the Incheon Strategy and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in 2015, while drawing on the rights-based
approach as envisaged in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, we move closer to realizing a disability-inclusive sustainable development in the region.

**Key Challenges:**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you can see, the Asia-Pacific region has been an active and a fervent champion of disability rights and development. Yet, despite such progress, we still face daunting challenges.

A larger proportion of persons with disabilities live in poverty than persons without disabilities. In Asia and the Pacific, differences in poverty rates between persons with disabilities and the overall population range from 20.6% to 3.9%. Similarly, persons with disabilities are two to six times less likely to find work than those without disabilities. ESCAP research shows that persons with disabilities account for only 0.4 per cent of the parliamentarians in Asia and the Pacific. For women with disabilities, this figure stands at a meagre 0.1 per cent.

Women with disabilities face multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination in the region in the labour market, access to reproductive health services as well as in relation to general safety and well-being.

Globally, Asia and the Pacific is the region most prone to both natural and man-made hazards. Evidence shows that persons with disabilities are two to four times more likely to be killed during disasters than others, making it urgent to include disability perspectives in disaster-risk reduction.

Last, but surely the most pressing challenge is the paucity of comparable and reliable data which is critical to ensure an effective progress-tracking mechanism in the region. The different definitions of disability along with differing ways and motivations for data-collection adopted in the region, point to the urgency of the need to pay attention to the standardization of disability data and statistics.

Such challenges require us to step-up our commitment to translate the spirit and letter of the Incheon strategy into action.
Concluding Section: Way Forward

Therefore, we are here today to refocus, recalibrate and renew our commitment to the Incheon Strategy through the proposed Beijing Declaration and Action Plan.

It is a happy coincidence that we are convening one week ahead of the International Day for Persons with Disabilities, which is celebrated on 3 December. Our deliberations in the next five days are pivotal to charting the course for disability-inclusive development in Asia and the Pacific for the next five years. For the coming days, we have put together a rich tapestry of programmes, including panel discussions, roundtables, side-events and workshops, all of which will add richness to the discourse on disability-inclusive development.

This is a unique opportunity to focus our collective energies on how best we can leverage the Incheon Strategy to achieve sustainable development in the Asia-Pacific region. I wish you all a very productive and enriching cycle of deliberations!

Let us make the best of this occasion and be worthy of the hopes of 690 million persons with disabilities.

Together, let us make the right real!

Thank you.