STATEMENT

BY
Representative Royal Government of Bhutan

Senior Officials Segment

AT THE

BEIJING, 27 NOVEMBER – 1 DECEMBER
Mr. Chairman,

Distinguished delegates from member states, international organizations, and civil society organizations,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Afternoon

On behalf of the Royal Government of Bhutan, I would like extend our warm appreciation and gratitude to the People and the Government of the People’s Republic of China, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), and the China Disabled Persons’ Federation and all the volunteers for all the support and arrangements in organizing this very important meeting on the Midpoint Review of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013-2022.

We are gathered here half a decade later after we committed to make 2013-2022 a decade for persons with disabilities, by improving the quality of life and fulfillment of the rights of the estimated 650 million persons with disability living in our region.

While we gauge our progress towards achieving the goals enshrined in the Incheon Strategy, we also reflect upon the challenges we overcame or are yet to overcome, Midway into the decade, in Bhutan, as may the case with other member states, much has been achieved and much remains to be done with respect to the targets set out in the Incheon Strategy ‘To make the Right Real’

The Royal Government of Bhutan has undertaken various initiatives towards the promotion and fulfillment of the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities. Some notable achievements are as follows:

- A high level inter-agency task force led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is currently assessing the preparedness of the Royal Government to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The task force includes representatives from
organizations representing persons with disabilities and government agencies. This directly contributes toward goals 2 and 9 of the Incheon Strategy.

- The Royal Government is in the final stages of drafting a national policy for persons with disabilities. It is being drafted by a multi-agency task force including representatives from non-governmental organizations related to persons with disabilities, true to the spirit of ‘Nothing about Us Without Us’. The task force is led by the Gross National Happiness Commission (GNHC). The policy directly contributes to all the 10 goals laid out in the Incheon Strategy. For instance, the policy has provisions for the inclusion of person with disabilities in the formulation of plans and policies including those related to disaster management and response. It also has provisions on the effective participation of people with disabilities in elections. The policy once approved will implemented through and action plan.

The Royal Government also undertook a survey in 2016 to assess the situation of persons with disabilities and service providers. The finding of the survey was used as inputs in drafting the policy for persons with disabilities. The survey was conducted by the Gross National Happiness Commission.

The Royal Government also undertook a Vulnerability Baseline Assessment report for 14 groups that were identified as being vulnerable. Persons with disabilities were identified as one of the groups. The purpose of the assessment was to gain an understanding on the social issues faced by vulnerable groups, the reasons behind certain vulnerabilities, and the readiness of Bhutan’s current policy, legal, and data landscape to address those challenges.

The Royal Government continues to pursue inclusive education. Currently there are 15 schools with inclusive and special education service, with plans increase it to 28 schools in the next five years. Free health care is still provided to all citizens, including disability specific services.
The Royal Government is also continuously working on standardizing and improving data related to the persons with disability. For Instance, the questions on the type of disability have been standardized based on the Washington Group Questions in the National Population and Housing Census 2017 and the National Labor Force Survey 2016. This will allow for better data standardization and comparison.

In addition to the some of the key achievement highlighted, the Royal Government continues to face challenges in ensuring the fulfillment of the rights of the people with disabilities. The major challenges are with respect to availability of disability related data and resources requirements in the provision of services to people with disability. Bhutan too lacks reliable data for some of its development indicators including those related to persons with disability. While some sector specific data are available, in some cases, data is no-existent. This causes problems in the formulation and monitoring of plans and polices, including reporting on the progress made on the targets of the Incheon Strategy. In addition, while everyone is aware additional cost may be incurred in the provision of services for people with disabilities, resource commitments seem to be limited both at the national and international levels. There are challenges that will continue to present themselves, till we jointly combine our efforts to develop and implement innovative means to address them.

In conclusion, our delegation would like to encourage all members, to continue building on our achievements and work to overcome our challenges, to ensure the Rights of the People With Disabilities are Made Real.

Thank You