SPEECH TO BE READ BY HON’BLE MINISTER OF SOCIAL JUSTICE & EMPOWERMENT, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA ON THE OCCASION OF INTER-GOVERNMENTAL MEETING ON THE MID-POINT REVIEW OF ASIA AND PACIFIC DECADE FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES ON 30TH NOVEMBER, 2017

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India is a country with rich cultural and traditional heritage. Here I would like to quote one Sloka from ancient Indian Scriptures.....

सर्वेभवन्तुसुखिनः।
सर्वेभन्तुनिरामयः।
सर्वेभद्राणिपश्यन्तु।
माकश्चितुदुःधभागवेत्॥

it means that :

May all be prosperous and happy
May all be free from illness
May all see what is spiritually uplifting
May no one suffer

2. The above feeling and spirit has been enshrined in The Indian Constitution, which guarantees freedom, justice and equality of all individuals, laying the foundation for an inclusive society.

3. India has always displayed strong commitment to the principles of the United Nations, and I am proud to say that it was among the first countries to ratify the U-N Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). In fact, not just this, India was the first country to ratify the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to
Published Works for Persons Who Are Print Disabled. The above two facts are merely illustrative of our abiding commitment towards betterment of those who are not as fortunate as the rest of us. This commitment stems from the virtues of compassion, humanity and empathy which have been imbibed in the Indian society and civilisation over the millennia.

4. India has recently taken a significant step towards meeting its obligations under the UNCRPD; and has enacted the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act. The Act was unanimously passed by the Indian Parliament.
in December 2016 and has come into force with effect from 19th April, 2017.

5. Some of the important affirmative actions under the said law include four percent reservation in Government jobs, five percent reservation of seats in Government and Government aided higher educational institutes and five percent reservation in poverty alleviation schemes and allotment of land for housing, setting up business at concessional rate of interest etc.

6. During the last three years under the stewardship of our Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, we have organised 5889 camps across the country wherein aids and
appliances worth Rs 5264 million have been distributed to 0.9 million persons with disabilities. Government of India also support cochlear implant surgery for children below 6 years of age diagnosed with hearing disability. We have also launched National Action Plan for Skill Development with a target of skilling 25 lakh persons with disabilities by the year 2022 through various stakeholders.

7. Empowerment of persons with disabilities is an inter-disciplinary process, covering various aspects namely, prevention, early detection, intervention, education, vocational training, rehabilitation and social integration. There are schemes in place for providing high
end contemporary devices for persons with disabilities to improve accessibility. Financial assistance is given to non-Government Organizations and individuals for the purpose of rehabilitation, education, vocational training and self employment. Major initiative has been taken to intensify awareness generation to promote legal rights.

8. The issues concerning empowerment of persons with disabilities are on the centre stage of the National Developmental Agenda of our Government. Our Hon’ble Prime Minister has coined the word “Divyangjan”, that is, “Persons with Divine Abilities” to address “Persons with Disabilities”. Use of the word
"Divyangjan" aims at upliftment of the societal status, promoting non-discrimination and instilling a positive attitude about their lives and capabilities in the society. The Government of India has also launched Accessible India Campaign, a flagship programme, to create barrier free environment for persons with disabilities. The campaign targets creation of physical and virtual infrastructure truly accessible and inclusive for the persons with disabilities and for making public buildings, transport system and information and communication technologies accessible on a wide scale. The Government is pursuing the programme with the States so as
to achieve the target within a given time frame.

9. We remain committed to building an enabling environment for the persons with disabilities, to enable them to enjoy their rights equally with others, and to realize their full potential. We are open to sharing of best practices and international cooperation for the empowerment and inclusion of persons with disabilities. The main objective of this Mission should be to provide them the opportunity and infrastructure to uplift them physically, psychologically, intellectually, socially and economically.
10. Let us utilise this opportunity of mid-point review of the Asian Pacific Decade for persons with disabilities and come out with practicable National and Regional action plans to achieve the goal of inclusion of persons with disabilities in the mainstream society. India would stand with the efforts made in this regard.

Thank you

Jai Hind!