**Speech for the 58th Edition of the Human Rights Council – Disability Rights Annual Panel**

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Honorable Chairs, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, and Esteemed Colleagues,

It is an honor to address this assembly on a matter of profound importance: the right to accessible, affordable, and high-quality assistive technologies. These are not simply tools; they are enablers of autonomy, independence, and dignity for persons with disabilities.

Yet today, far too many people are denied access to the assistive products they need. Across the world, individuals are left without the means to communicate, move freely, or participate fully in society. For persons with disabilities, this gap can mean the difference between inclusion and isolation.

Access to assistive technology is not a privilege; it is a fundamental human right, as recognized in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Convention makes clear that states have an obligation to ensure access to quality assistive technologies at an affordable cost. Without this, the goals of equality, inclusion, and full participation remain out of reach.

Despite these commitments, barriers persist. The World Health Organization reports that only one in ten people globally has access to the assistive products they need. In many countries, including high-income ones, high costs, limited availability, and lack of policy support leave persons with disabilities without the tools they need. Even in high-income countries, financial barriers and gaps in social protection leave persons with disabilities without the tools they need. In low-income settings, the situation is even more concerning. Many persons with disabilities, including those with deafblindness, must purchase additional technology beyond mainstream tools or rely on multiple devices to meet their needs.

However, the issue goes beyond access. For example, deafblind persons often lack the right to choose their preferred assistive devices, with limited options that may not meet their needs. Every person should have the right to select and obtain the device that best supports their communication and independence. Additionally, even when devices are available, the challenge lies in learning how to use them. Few professionals are trained in sign language or communication methods used by deafblind persons, leaving devices underutilized and ineffective.

Technology is not, and must never be seen as, a substitute for human support. For many persons with disabilities, especially those with deafblindness, technology can complement but not replace personal assistance. Guide-interpreters or Deafblind interpreters play an essential role in ensuring full participation in society. Without them, even the most advanced technology cannot guarantee true inclusion and autonomy.

A human rights-based approach is essential to breaking down these barriers. Assistive technology must be integrated into national health and social care policies. Persons with disabilities and their representative organisations, must be directly involved in the design and development of assistive technologies so that solutions reflect real needs. Financial accessibility must be a priority, with funding mechanisms that ensure assistive technologies do not become a burden on those who need them most. Training for professionals and awareness-raising efforts can create an environment where assistive technologies are not only available but effectively used.

Caregivers and support networks play an indispensable role. They must have access to the training and resources needed to assist individuals in using assistive technologies. Strong partnerships between governments, civil society, organizations of persons with disabilities, and the private sector are needed to drive innovation, expand access, and ensure that no one is left behind. Collaboration can foster research, improve the availability of assistive products, and create accountability for the implementation of policies. International cooperation is key to reducing disparities and ensuring that the right to assistive technology is upheld everywhere, not just in some parts of the world.

Accessible, affordable, and high-quality assistive technologies are about more than just innovation. They are about justice, equality, and dignity. Ensuring access is not an option—it is an obligation. A world where persons with disabilities are fully included is not just a dream. It is a responsibility we all share, and it is a reality we must commit to building together.

For persons without disabilities, technology may enhance daily life, but for persons with disabilities, in particular, persons with deafblindness, it is a vital tool for inclusion and participation.

Thank you.