**11th Session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

**President of the Conference H.E. Mr. Georgi Panayotov, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Bulgaria to the UN**

**Closing Statement**

**Honourable Ministers,**

**Excellencies,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We are coming to the end of this session.

First, I would like to once again thank all States Parties for the confidence entrusted in us to organize and convene this important session. We are grateful also to DESA and OHCHR as Secretariat of the Conference for their support in preparing the substantive part of the session, as well as to DGACM and the UN Secretariat as a whole for all the assistance they rendered to the Bureau in the course of the last three days. Special thanks goes to the interpreters for their professional work. I would like to recognize also the excellent work of the sign language interpreters and CART providers whose contribution was crucial for ensuring the accessibility and inclusiveness of the Conference as our main objective.

The 11th session of the Conference of States Parties to the CRPD benefited from the participation of the UN Secretary-General who committed to further strengthening the implementation of the Convention within the UN system through a system wide policy mainstreaming the rights of persons with disabilities in all activities of the organization. The UN engagement with the human rights of persons with disabilities at the highest level is commendable and very timely considering the growing number of States Parties to the CRPD - 177 to date, which is close to universal ratification and shows the strong political commitment of the majority of Member States to advance the rights of persons with disabilities. We encourage a leadership role of the UN in these endeavours; the UN should lead by example of how full inclusion and effective participation of persons with disabilities can be achieved in reality.

Our Conference this year marked the 10th anniversary since the entry into force of this most progressive human rights treaty - the CRPD - which established the principle of how Governments can work together with the disability community and the civil society to deliver better results on the ground for over 1 million persons with disabilities worldwide.

It is no coincidence that this year we celebrate also the greatest global achievement in the field of human rights - the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which was adopted by the General Assembly in 1948 and has since laid the foundation of the whole system of international human rights law establishing the principles of universality of human rights and ensuring the dignity and worth of the human person.

When reflecting on those achievements in international human rights law and practice we should always remember that the goal is nothing less than all human rights for all, and including persons with disabilities effectively is a crucial prerequisite for achieving this goal.

I believe our Conference of States Parties to the CRPD has shown exactly how we can achieve that - together. Our deliberations in the last three days in the framework of the Conference have shown how much more we can accomplish when we make a collective effort and include meaningfully persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in all processes of decision-making. Achieving the effective implementation of all human rights for all, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized, and persons with disabilities, means also their effective inclusion and participation and I am happy that in the last three days we actually proved how this can be done in practice. We have taken action to deliver on the principles as enshrined in the Convention which is remarkable.

The 11th session of the Conference benefited from a very rich programme which covered a wide range of issues related to the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities identifying some of the challenges but also providing good examples of how to overcome them. Through the overarching theme of *Leaving no one behind through the full implementation of the CRPD* the Conference emphasized the importance of strengthening the inclusive implementation of the 2030 Agenda by operationalizing the role of persons with disabilities as agents of change for sustainable development.

We had a record number of speakers during the General Debate this year – around 140 in total. In the Ministerial Segment we heard from more than 35 high-level speakers. We benefited also from the valuable input of organizations of persons with disabilities, civil society and other stakeholders.

The three round table discussions during this year’s Conference focused on a number of crucial issues for the full implementation of the Convention such as national fiscal space, public-private partnerships and international cooperation, as well as political participation and equal recognition before the law of persons with disabilities. Special attention was paid to the specific vulnerability of women and girls with disabilities addressing the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination they face.

We had a very informative and useful exchange on the implementation of the Convention with the UN system, the Chair of the CRPD Committee, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility. An important takeout of this interactive segment is the need to further strengthen UN action on the rights of persons with disabilities as a consistent systemwide policy.

During the 11th session of the Conference of States Parties we witnessed also a historic high number of side events - more than 100 - hosted jointly by Member States, the UN System and civil society organizations discussing a wide range of pertinent issues on the global agenda concerning the rights of persons with disabilities that greatly enriched the debate at the official programme. These activities contributed also to raising awareness about the key principles of the Convention and the rights of persons with disabilities in global action.

The Conference elected 9 experts to serve at the CRPD Committee starting from 1 January 2019.

The traditional Civil Society Forum held on the day before the official opening of the Conference was dedicated this year to a General Discussion of the CRPD Committee on the implementation of Articles 4.3 and 33.3 pertaining to civil society participation. The Forum once again provided valuable insights with regard to our deliberations at the Conference and the implementation of the Convention in general.

Our 11th session further strengthened the implementation of Article 4.3 - following the practice established last year persons with disabilities and their representative organizations participated in all segments of the Conference - from speaking at the opening, General Debate and closing to co-chairing the thematic roundtables and contributing to all discussions, which made this Conference the most inclusive and participatory so far, in full alignment with the provisions of the Convention as the only international human rights treaty that recognizes the role in its implementation and monitoring of the people it is trying to impact. In the last two years the Bureau under the leadership of Bulgaria has put a stronger emphasis on the participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations as well as National Human Rights Institutions and other stakeholders in all deliberations related to the implementation of the CRPD. More prominent role was accorded also to the CRPD Committee and the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities whose profound knowledge and expertise is instrumental for further strengthening the implementation of the Convention and assisting States Parties in their efforts to deliver on their commitments.

The Conference reaffirmed its role as a useful platform to forge partnerships among the different stakeholders – Member States, persons with disabilities, civil society, NHRIs, the UN System, treaty bodies, special procedures and others – with a view to further promoting the principles of the Convention and contributing to the realization of all human rights for persons with disabilities.

During our discussions a number of important issues were highlighted that need more attention and concrete action both on the part of States Parties and the UN system in order to ensure that the commitments with regard to the CRPD and the 2030 Agenda are fulfilled. It is essential to ensure that achieving the SDGs would lead to the realization of all human rights of persons with disabilities and their empowerment and inclusion in society on an equal basis with others. Disaggregation of data by disability is one of the crucial issues that need to be addressed urgently in order to deliver on the promise of the 2030 Agenda to leave no one behind and reach the furthest behind first.

I believe the 11th Session was successful in achieving its main goal to ensure the inclusion and full participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in the implementation of the Convention thus contributing to achieving sustainable development for all.

This is the last Conference for the current Bureau and for Bulgaria as President. It was an honour and a privilege for me to chair the Conference and together with my distinguished colleagues on the Bureau, namely Germany (Ambassador Christoph Heusgen and Mr. Thomas Rohland), Tunisia (Ambassador Mohamed Khaled Khiari and Ms. Nesrine Elmansouri), Sri Lanka (Ambassador Amrith Rohan Perera, Mr. Madhuka Wickramarachchi and Ms. Rekha Gunasekera) and Ecuador (The First Lady H.E. Ms. Rocio Gonzalez de Moreno, Ms. Irina Moreno and Mr. Fabian Garcia), to be able to contribute to its success. But our journey does not stop here. We remain fully committed to the CRPD and will continue to actively promote the effective inclusion and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities as equal partners in decision-making at all levels.

**Thank you!**