|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| image1.png | **PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF**  **BULGARIA**  **TO THE UNITED NATIONS** |

**11 East 84th Street, New York, NY 10028, Tel: (212) 737 4790, Fax: (212) 472 9865, e-mail: bulgaria@un.int**

**11th session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 12 - 14 June 2018, UNHQ, New York**

***Empowering persons with disabilities and building inclusive societies:***

***Right to education, freedom of expression and access to information, participation in and enjoyment of culture***

**New York, 13 June 2018**

**H.E. Mr. Georgi Panayotov, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Bulgaria to the UN and President of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

**Excellencies,**

**Distinguished Guests,**

It is my pleasure to address you today first on behalf of the Government of Bulgaria and also in my capacity as President of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Bulgaria is honoured to co-host this important event on inclusive education and the empowerment of persons with disabilities together with our partners - UNESCO, Tunisia, Colombia, OHCHR, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Nippon Foundation.

I would like to highlight the crucial role of education for the empowerment of persons with disabilities and for ensuring their full participation in society on an equal basis with others. The right to education is explicitly mentioned throughout the Convention but Article 24 holds a particular significance as a standalone article which addresses the issue comprehensively obliging States Parties to ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning with a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity.

Bulgaria is strongly committed to the promotion and protection of the human rights of persons with disabilities and the full implementation of the CRPD. The Bulgarian Government has identified the rights of persons with disabilities and their equal participation in society as one of the key priorities on the political agenda of the current Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union and is working actively with partners to strengthen the implementation of the CRPD through targeted measures aimed at ensuring non-discrimination and equal opportunities for persons with disabilities in all aspects of the economic and public life and through investing in education and early childhood development for all.

Bulgaria attaches special attention to promoting the right to quality education for all. In 2016 the Bulgarian Government adopted a new Pre-school and School Education Act which establishes inclusive education as a state policy. Inclusive education is viewed as a system of understanding, accepting and supporting the individuality of every child to thrive and be able to realize their full potential. Targeted funding is provided for ensuring the access to education of the most disadvantaged children, including children and youth with disabilities. The Government provides the necessary resources for enabling the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream education thus creating the conditions for their empowerment and effective participation in the community.

The Bulgarian Government is constantly upgrading the relevant legislation to further strengthen the implementation of the CRPD and ensure the empowerment of persons with disabilities. New legislation is currently being prepared in relation to CRPD Article 21 on freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information, which includes a provision for the introduction of Bulgarian sign language. The Bulgarian Government engages persons with disabilities and their representative organizations as equal partners in all processes related to the implementation of the Convention - from drafting legislation through its implementation and monitoring thus ensuring the inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities.

As President of the Conference of States Parties to the CRPD in the current period Bulgaria has worked hard to ensure the inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities in decision-making processes at global level as well and we believe the Conference has proven once again this year its significance as the most inclusive and participatory global forum on the rights of persons with disabilities which further strengthens the implementation of the Convention.

**Thank you!**