**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**

**Opening Statement**

**Honourable Ministers,**

**Excellencies,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The protection and promotion of human rights is one of the three main pillars of the United Nations, a core value enshrined in the UN Charter and an underlying principle of the work of the organization in different areas. This year marks the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights - a historic document which even though not legally binding has been adopted in or has influenced most national constitutions since 1948 and has laid the foundation of all international human rights treaties thereafter that uphold the rights and dignity of all, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized in our societies and persons with disabilities.

This year has a particular significance for persons with disabilities as it marks also the 10th anniversary since the entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2006 and entered into force in May 2008. The adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities marked a major paradigm shift to a human rights model of disability, codifying the principles of equality, non-discrimination and respect for human dignity and diversity, and the empowerment of persons with disabilities and their inclusion and full participation in society. It contains strong provisions for the full development of the human potential and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity.

It is encouraging to see the stable trend towards universal ratification of the CRPD with 177 States Parties to date which shows a strong commitment to the promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities from the majority of countries in the world. I would like to acknowledge Ireland, Libya and Monaco who have ratified the Convention in the last year after the 10th Conference of States Parties.

In the 11 years since the adoption of the CRPD the international community has taken significant steps to advance its implementation. Progress has been made in many of our countries and by the United Nations. I would like to highlight in this regard the work initiated by the Secretary-General for a System Wide Action Plan on Disability and we are looking forward to hearing more about this important initiative today. We are encouraged also by the efforts of the President of the General Assembly to improve the accessibility of the GA Hall which has been a key priority for Bulgaria as President of the Conference in the current term. All these efforts are important for strengthening and mainstreaming the rights of persons with disabilities throughout the UN system but more needs to be done and can be done to make a difference in the lives of over one billion persons with disabilities worldwide to ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy all human rights and are included in society on an equal basis with others.

Together, we must continue to make every effort to achieve the goals of the Convention and to create societies without discrimination promoting the inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities. We have to strengthen efforts to ensure equal rights for persons with disabilities in all aspects of life.

Over the years the Conference of States Parties has been steadily growing and gaining prominence and has now become the largest and most important global forum on the rights of persons with disabilities. As President of the Conference Bulgaria together with the distinguished Vice-Presidents from Ecuador, Tunisia, Sri Lanka and Germany is strongly committed to ensuring the success of the Conference as a useful platform where States Parties, persons with disabilities and their representative organizations, the UN system, National Human Rights Institutions, civil society and other stakeholders share good practices and identify ways to strengthen policies and improve practices to fully implement the CRPD.

Last year’s Conference of States Parties started the second decade of the CRPD and was the most inclusive and participatory so far with more than 1300 participants from over 170 States Parties and Observers and hundreds of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations who contributed to the success of the Conference.

As the international community is taking action to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, our deliberations and contributions at the Conference of States Parties gain stronger impetus and importance to deliver also on the ambition to leave no one behind through a human rights-based approach fully implementing the CRPD. We must amplify our efforts to ensure the realization of the human rights of persons with disabilities and their inclusion in society on an equal basis with others.

Taking into account all these positive developments and global commitments that reinforce the purposes and principles of the Convention the over-arching theme for the our 11th session of the Conference of States Parties is “Leaving no one behind through the full implementation of the CRPD”.

Under this year’s overarching theme our Conference will focus on the following more specific topics:

* National fiscal space, public-private partnerships and international cooperation for strengthening the implementation of the CRPD;
* Women and girls with disabilities;
* Political participation and equal recognition before the law.

The overarching theme and the sub-themes that have been agreed on by the Bureau in close consultation with all the different stakeholders, including Members States, the UN System, Civil Society and other stakeholders, and especially persons with disabilities and their representative organizations, reflect some of the most pressing issues for persons with disabilities which are crucial for achieving the goals of the Convention and more broadly also - for delivering on other major global commitments of recent years. The success of all international agreements would largely depend on how we engage everyone in their implementation and ensure that the voice of the most vulnerable and marginalized is heard and taken into consideration in all decision-making.

The ambitious 2030 Agenda has laid the foundation for a more inclusive and people-centered approach by, for the first time, recognizing persons with disabilities as agents of change for sustainable development. Since the CRPD embraces both human rights and development, persons with disabilities should be actively involved in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda to ensure that indeed “no one is left behind”. If we are to achieve sustainable development, we need to make sure that all efforts towards achieving the SDGs take into consideration the human rights of persons with disabilities in line with the CRPD.

I look forward to the next few days to explore ways for further strengthening the cooperation and partnership among States Parties, United Nations entities, civil society and other stakeholders, especially persons with disabilities themselves, to advance our shared mission: the full implementation of the Convention and the realization of the human rights of persons with disabilities with a view to achieving inclusive development in line with the CRPD.

**Thank you!**