# Joint statement by the Group of Friends

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Friends of Persons with Disabilities. We take this opportunity to acknowledge initiatives currently under way and encourage further actions for ensuring the rights of persons with disabilities and the challenges they face are meaningfully addressed in the UN system and processes.

We welcome the leadership role being taken by the President of the General Assembly to ensure the accessibility of his meetings and engaging the broader UN system on accessibility discussions. We encourage these efforts to continue under the leadership of the President-elect of the 73rd General Assembly and her successors.

In that regard, we welcome the construction work soon to be under way in the General Assembly Hall to make this key UN venue more accessible for persons with disabilities. We see this as a step in continuous process of improving accessibility measures at the UN, including in this very Conference Room.

However, the UN should be at the forefront of best practices and lead by example as to how the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities should be fully implemented. These discussions should extend well beyond just physical accessibility to include all other elements outlined in the Convention, such as communication and social accessibility.

In this regard, we welcome the Secretary-General’s announcement of the new system wide policy. This is important for strengthening and mainstreaming the rights of persons with disabilities throughout the UN system, both externally and for those working at the UN. We lend our support to this initiative and look forward to hearing more as this process continues to take shape.

Persons with disabilities face unique challenges and barriers in all aspects of life. If we don’t meaningfully address these challenges, we won’t fulfil our promise to not leave anyone behind. This includes recognition of the rights of persons with disabilities in all UN processes, including the ambitious UN reforms currently under way and intergovernmental negotiations such as the Global Compacts for Migration and Refugees.

The issue of data remains critical. Recalling Sustainable Development Goal 17.18 and its requirement to disaggregate data by disability, we are disappointed that this issue has not yet been resolved. We acknowledge the initiative of the statistical commission to convene a group of experts to produce guidelines on disability data collection. We note, however, that for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals for persons with disabilities, time is of the essence. We continue to consider that the Washington Group Short Set of Questions are appropriate, broadly testedeasy to implement in censuses and surveys, and compared to other available methodologies, resource-efficient in producing internationally comparable data. While recognizing that countries may need various instruments to monitor their own national disability-inclusive development plans, for the purposes of monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals, we urge countries and those areas in the UN system that have not yet done so to use the Washington Group Short Set of Questions to produce internationally comparable data.

We recall the importance of inclusive development – ensuring the inclusion of and accessibility for persons with disabilities in fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals meaningfully, also through the participation of persons with disabilities.

In this regard, we welcome the representation of persons with disabilities on the Committee and express the hope that this representation as well as gender parity and geographical representation be meaningfully sustained and wish them all success in discharging their office.

Thank you.