“Your Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

This statement is on behalf of all the members of Disabled People’s International (DPI) across 130 countries in 7 regions across the world.

Today, we join the world community in celebrating ‘International Day of Persons with Disabilities’. We thank the United Nations and particularly the leadership at DESA for all their efforts, especially over the past few years following the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

The theme this year is “Break Barriers, Open Doors: for an inclusive society and development for all”, and nothing could have been more apt.

Inclusion has been the running thread vis-à-vis disability mainstreaming. The High Level Meeting on Disability & Development in September this year has set the tone for breaking barriers and ensuring inclusion, at least as far as development is concerned. We are hopeful that these small but significant steps will lead to an inclusive post-2015 development agenda.

GLOBAL SOUTH:

As we celebrate, DPI urges everyone to be cautious. Whatever ‘progress’ we make, we must always measure it from the perspective of the 800 million people with disabilities living in the global South. DPI represents these voices that are often not heard. DPI represents those who have been 'left behind' – in education, in employment, in health care and social life, and much much more. These stark realities must define all our present and future discourses on breaking barriers and on inclusion. As somebody has very aptly said, the global South is not about geography. It is about history!

WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES:

Another constituency whose rights we must constantly reiterate in all our deliberations is that of women and girls with disabilities.

Women work two-thirds of the world's working hours, produce half of the world's food, yet earn only 10 percent of the world's income and own less than 1 percent of the world's property. Women play a critical role in sustaining the world's economies and yet, their lives are shattered by patriarchy and culture. They continue to remain voiceless as they too have been 'left behind'!
Women's empowerment is therefore a pathway to Sustainable Development.

Policy makers should integrate gender equality and women's empowerment into poverty reduction, democratic governance, crisis prevention and recovery, and environment and sustainable development. Leaders should ensure that women have a real voice in all governance institutions, from the judiciary to the civil service, as well as in the private sector and in civil society, so they can participate equally with men in public dialogue and decision-making and influence decisions that will determine the future of not just their families but their countries.

Ladies and gentlemen, what is true for women in general is doubly, perhaps triply true for women with disabilities. Triple the disadvantage, triple the discrimination, triple the stigma.

GRASSROOT MOVEMENTS:

Today, there is tremendous 'buzz' in the international disability movement about the post-2015 development agenda. The air is thick with excitement in New York and Geneva.

However, we are failing somewhere to create an equal 'buzz' in the grassroots disability movements. We need to urgently rectify this. We have to ask ourselves time and again ‘For whom does development mean the most?’ and ‘Are we making sure that they are speaking for themselves?’

The slogan ‘Nothing About Us Without Us’ should hold meaning for people with disabilities from the global South, including girls and women with disabilities. They should speak for themselves. They should be allowed to speak for themselves.

Thank you.”