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**SECRETARY-GENERAL’S SENIOR ADVISOR ON POLICY**

**Ms. ANA MARÍA MENÉNDEZ**

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**Global Launch of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines**

**on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action**

**Tuesday, 12 November 2019**

Excellencies, distinguished guests, friends,

I am very pleased to be with you today for the launch of the Guidelines, and bring warm greetings from the Secretary-General.

Back in June, when launching the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, the Secretary-General made it clear that disability inclusion is central to the promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: leave no one behind. He underscored that realizing the rights of persons with disabilities is not only a matter of justice but a necessary investment in our common future.

But for that to happen -- to move from promises to reality -- we don’t need to just change our laws, our policies or our operational frameworks. What we need is to fundamentally change our mindset. We need a mindset that leads us to view and shape our response based on the people we serve, and recognize that while everyone has the same rights, their needs may be different.

As a diverse population, multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination further compound the experience of people with disabilities in a situation of conflict or crisis. For example, children with disabilities are at higher risk of abuse and neglect. Women and girls with disabilities are at higher risk of sexual violence and other forms of gender-based violence.

There is no doubt that persons with disabilities are among the most marginalized in any crisis-affected community. But despite being disproportionately impacted, persons with disabilities are routinely excluded from humanitarian assistance.

Last year, an institutional review on disability inclusion, commissioned by the Secretary-General looked at the UN’s performance. The findings highlighted examples of good practice, but also revealed significant gaps - particularly in the area of peace and security, as well as in the field.

This cannot and should not continue.

We have to bring about change in the way we respond, operate and most importantly think about the people we assist.

I am therefore encouraged to see that this change is finally happening. The guidelines being launched today are the first system-wide operational guidelines of their kind, developed *with* persons with disabilities and *for* persons with disabilities. I congratulate all those who have worked hard over the last three years on their development.

The Guidelines establish the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders in making humanitarian action more disability inclusive. They identify key actions across sectors that must be undertaken to ensure that people with disabilities are not left behind in the planning, design, implementation and monitoring of humanitarian action, including the collection of data and strengthening of humanitarian coordination. And across all of this, the Guidelines reinforce the role and responsibility of organizations of persons with disabilities as actors and partners in this work.

This is an important step in changing the way we operate and think about our humanitarian programming. But let’s not be complacent – let’s further our ambition.

Now that they are in place, our attention must turn to quick and serious actions that translate these guidelines into real impact.

For the Secretary-General, the role of the UN is clear: we must lead by example.

The IASC Guidelines are about us living up to the normative standards that we have developed over these past seven decades. It is about the UN system recognizing that disability inclusion is not a mere add-on, but is central to our objectives of peace, justice, dignity, rights and development for all.

And here, Member States too have an essential role to play in advocating for change; monitoring implementation; supporting UN leadership to advance the strategy through governing boards; supporting budgetary or policy changes; and working with Resident Coordinators and Humanitarian Coordinators to support implementation at the country level.

Late last year, for the very first time the Security Council discussed persons with disabilities.

Dear friends. Our partners - civil society organizations, particularly organisations of persons with disabilities - have a critical role to play, not only in ensuring that our actions are sufficiently ambitious, but that they are also tailored to the reality on the ground for people with disabilities.

The private sector, development cooperation partners and others will also play an important role. I am confident that the Guidelines will contribute to this effort.

Thank you.