**Build Back Better – A post-pandemic world**

Hello. I am Rosemary Kayess, Vice-Chair of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

At the recent G20 meeting, many world leaders made reference to the fact that none of us are safe until we are all safe. They were speaking in reference to ensuring no-one was left behind in the roll out of vaccines to address the COVID-19 pandemic. But what has been demonstrated by the COVID-19 pandemic, is that true safety and resilience can only come from addressing the inherent inequality and discrimination that has been exposed by the pandemic, including for persons with disabilities.

The UN Secretary-General in his policy brief, A Disability-Inclusive Response to COVID-19, has stressed that we need to ‘Build Back Better’. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed that the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) has not been comprehensively implemented by States Parties. But, it is only through addressing inequality and discrimination that we can build a post-pandemic world that is equitable, sustainable and resilient.

Persons with disabilities are often wrongly perceived to be inherently vulnerable, when it is attitudinal, environmental and institutional barriers that result in situations of vulnerability.  While many persons with disabilities have health conditions that make them more susceptible to COVID-19, pre-existing discrimination and inequality means that persons with disabilities are one of the most excluded groups in terms of health prevention and response actions and economic and social support measures, and among the hardest hit in terms of transmission risk and actual fatalities.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlights that protection, response and recovery efforts will not be effective unless everyone is equally valued and included. However, persons with disabilities were left out of the decision-making processes during the COVID-19 pandemic, which left us at greater risk and without protection, specific responses and recovery measures.

CRPD General Comment No. 7 (2018) stresses that the active and informed participation of everyone in decisions that affect their lives and rights is consistent with the human rights-based approach in public decision-making processes and ensures good governance and social accountability. This means that persons with disabilities through their representative organisations, such as the Commonwealth Disabled People’s Forum, must be explicitly involved and included in decision-making processes to ‘build back better’.

The CRPD outlines the normative legal standards to address discrimination and inequality, and these standards need to be integral to COVID-19 protection, response and recovery measures.  A human rights approach is critical to response and recovery efforts not only in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, but also to ensure that States take action now to build equitable, sustainable and resilient societies that have the mechanisms to prevent and respond rapidly to future public health emergencies and to ensure that ‘no-one is left behind’.