**Opening of the Conference of States Parties (item 1)**

**10.00 am to 1.00 pm (General Assembly Hall)**

**Speaker #6. Dr. Joseph Murray, Civil Society Representative, International Disability Alliance, World Federation of the Deaf**

Distinguished delegates, colleagues, and friends,

I speak today on behalf of civil society and in particular, as a representative of the global movement of persons with disabilities. I must begin with a simple truth: We are running out of time.

Around the world, we are witnessing a resurgence of fear-driven politics, of budgets that claim to protect security but exclude and silence those who have long been left at the margins. Military spending climbs, while support for disability rights - inclusive education, economic empowerment, accessible healthcare, and social protection are declining.

Too often, persons with disabilities are viewed as burdens. Our lives are reduced to service costs. Our contributions go unrecognized. But we are not passive recipients of development—we are builders of society, holders of rights, gatherers of data, experts in context appropriate solutions, and leaders of change.

We must not forget the denial of human rights that led to the formation of the UNCRPD. False science of Eugenics, forced sterilization, incarceration in long stay institution, segregation in special schools and denial of access to education.

This year’s theme asks how to enhance public awareness of the rights and contributions of persons with disabilities in advancing social development. Our answer is clear: by dismantling the systems that discriminate, segregate and silence us. By ensuring that the upcoming Second World Summit on Social Development does not repeat the failures of the past, but chooses a new path—one that is inclusive, rights-based, sustainable, and rooted in the lived expertise of our communities.

Yesterday, at the Civil Society Forum, representatives from diverse sectors convened to discuss challenges and opportunities from the movement. Even after nearly 20 years since the CRPD’s adoption, we are still waiting for the paradigm shift of how disability is understood to impact the lives of persons with disabilities globally.

This means not delaying **deinstitutionalization** another decade, but treating this with urgency—as a moral imperative and a human rights obligation under Article 19 of the CRPD. Where we finally eliminate segregated services and instead invest in robust, inclusive, rights-based care and support systems that allow all people, with or without disabilities, to live in their communities, with dignity and choice.

This means that the value of **our labour is recognized—**in the private and public sector, in entrepreneurship, in scientific research, in technology and innovation.

A paradigm where **inclusive digital transformation** accelerates instead of slowing down. We must bridge the digital divides—disability, gender, geography—so that technology and AI advance human rights, not entrench exclusion.

And most importantly, we must **shift the narrative.**

Charity campaigns and awareness-raising days are not enough to increase public awareness. Awareness is built when persons with disabilities are recognized and represented—in mainstream communities, public office, at negotiation tables, in media, in parliaments, and in peacebuilding processes. When OPDs—our organizations—are adequately resourced, trusted, and meaningfully included. When we are given a seat at the table, just as we are at COSP today.

We therefore urge Member States and UN agencies to take seriously the important role that organizations of persons with disabilities have contributed to the implementation of the CRPD. From decent work, to psychosocial health, to strengthening data processes, and social protection, we have provided concrete and achievable language to align the outcome with the Convention and the 2030 Agenda.

But this is not just about documents, this is about people.

We also call for an intentional intersectional approach to be embedded across all implementation and accountability efforts. The lived experiences of persons with disabilities are shaped by multiple, intersecting forms of discrimination, whether based on gender, age, indigeneity, ethnicity, race, sexuality or socioeconomic status. Their leadership, perspectives, and priorities must be central to every stage of policy development, data collection, service provision, and global dialogue.

It is about a young woman with a disability, denied an education because her school remains inaccessible. It is about a man with psychosocial disabilities institutionalized against his will and denied his liberty for years. It is about the deaf CRPD Committee member who is told that there is not enough UN budget for sign language interpretation to allow him to perform his role. It is about the millions of deaf people around the world who have their linguistic and information accessibility rights denied.

There is so much work to do, but there is also immense hope and opportunity.

That is why COSP matters. it is a space that belongs to us all. A space where civil society, and especially organizations of persons with disabilities, can speak with clarity, urgency, and vision. It is one of the few global platforms where we are not just observers, but active participants in shaping the decisions that affect our lives.

Here, we bring not only our concerns but our solutions—grounded in rights, lived experience, and a determination to build a more just and inclusive world. In times of challenge and constraint, this Conference reminds us that global solidarity is still possible, and that progress is achievable. Let us carry that optimism forward.

We, the Disability Movement recognise we must continue to defend and implement the UNCRPD against the damaging ideology attacking Diversity, Inclusion and Access.

We are here because we believe in the transformation that the CRPD promises us, and we look forward to the Second World Summit for Social Development which will reflect the highest level of inclusion for persons with disabilities.

Thank you.