

**Welcoming remarks by Ms. Rola Dashti
Executive Secretary of ESCWA**

**Arab Region Launch of the Global Campaign for the
“Good Treatment of Girls, Boys, and Adolescents with Disabilities in the World”
United Nations House, Beirut, 7 March 2019**

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to ESCWA today to participate in this special event. Together with UNICEF, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the Embassy of Chile, we have invited you to launch the Global Campaign on the “Good Treatment of Girls, Boys, and Adolescents with Disabilities in the World”. The campaign was developed by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Disability and Accessibility, Ms. Maria Soledad Cisternas Reyes, who has joined us today.

There are over 200 million children and young people in the Arab region: 60 per cent of the region’s population is under the age of 30. By 2030, their numbers are estimated to reach almost 250 million. This unprecedented youth bulge makes it especially necessary to turn our attention to the needs of young persons with disabilities.

As many of you know, disability in the Arab region remains one of the most overlooked, yet significant sources of disadvantage, discrimination, exclusion and marginalization. There is no doubt that the conflicts affecting our region are increasing the number of disabilities caused by injury, trauma, illness, disease and malnutrition.

Children and young people with disabilities have far lower rates of literacy and educational attainment. Girls with disabilities, especially those living in rural areas, are particularly vulnerable to exclusion and marginalization. For example, according to our data, the literacy rates of women with disabilities in rural areas are between 44 and 69 per cent lower than those of urban women without disabilities. The chances of young people with disabilities being included in the labour market are also limited.

The situation is even worse for refugees with disabilities. Humanity and Inclusion recently found that over 20 per cent of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon over the age of 2 have disabilities. Less than half of refugee children with disabilities are enrolled in school, compared with 70 per cent of those without disabilities.

Almost all Arab countries have either signed or ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and are making great efforts to improve the lives of persons with disabilities. However, more investment is needed to make education and labour markets inclusive. Countries must work harder to overcome stigma and other barriers that hinder the full inclusion of young people with disabilities in society.

To practice what we preach, here at the United Nations, we are also working hard to improve our inward and outward looking policies in relation to both young people and persons with disabilities. In 2018, the Secretary-General adopted the United Nations Youth Strategy, which commits us to addressing the needs and advancing the rights of all young people across the world. We are also now in the process of finalizing a UN system-wide policy and accountability framework on mainstreaming the inclusion of persons with disabilities across our policies and programmes and in our workplaces. We, at the United Nations, must hold ourselves accountable to the same standards as we hold our 193 member States.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development promises to leave no one behind. Removing barriers for young people with disabilities and ensuring their good treatment are central to achieving this promise, and to implementing the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The good treatment of the most vulnerable members of society is the quintessence of humanity.



I would like to thank you all once again for attending this Arab region launch of the Special Envoy's Global Campaign. We are extremely pleased to see such a high level of interest, especially from the young people who have joined us today. I am confident that our efforts will help us all increase our understanding of how we can guarantee the good treatment of boys, girls, and adolescents with disabilities.

Thank you.