

Panel Discussion on STEM: Expanding opportunities for women and girls with disabilities in education and employment at the 55th session of the Commission on the Status of Women

Wednesday, 23 February 1.15 – 2.30 p.m.

Conference room 4

- Good afternoon and a very warm welcome to our panellists, representatives from governments, civil society and colleagues - - ladies and gentlemen. On behalf of DESA and our co-sponsors, I would like to thank you all for participating in today's discussion.
- Our distinguished panellists have been invited to talk to us on the topic of expanding opportunities for education and employment for women and girls with disabilities in the field of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.
- The panel is organized by DESA in close collaboration with civil society organizations, and co-sponsored by the governments of **Argentina**, the **Philippines** and **South Africa** and the Global Partnership on Disability and Development (GPDD).
- In accordance with the mandates of GA resolutions on disability and development, including most recent resolutions [A/63/150, A/64/131 and A/65/186] women with disabilities

and their empowerment is a major focus of the commitment of the international community.

- During the 49th session of the Commission for Social Development which closed last week, the UN Special Rapporteur on Disability in his presentation of the report to the commission highlighted his priority and commitment to raise awareness on the vulnerability of girls and women with disabilities.
- DESA also emphasizes on the synergies and complementariness between the CRPD and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) as well as the Convention on the Rights of the Child. There is wide scope for stakeholders working to promote the implementation of these instruments to collaborate and DESA would welcome such partnerships.
- Over the past couple years, DESA has collaborated with governments, civil society organizations as well as development agencies to organize a number of events to promote the dialogue and discussion on advancing the inclusion of girls and women with disabilities in society and development. For example during the high level ECOSOC ministerial meeting in July last year, DESA with civil society organizations co-organized 2 events. One was a panel

discussion on the role of information and communication technologies in empowering women with disabilities and the second was an interactive panel discussion on towards the equality for women and girls with disabilities, both during the ECOSOC high level segment. Later in the year, in October 2010, DESA in collaboration with governments organized another side event on the inclusion of women with disabilities in post-conflict reconstruction and peace building efforts, in conjunction with the UN Security Council Session on the 10th Anniversary of Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

- We cannot ignore the prevalent gap between girls and boys with disabilities as well as women and men with disabilities across a wide range of economic and social indicators. There is an urgent need to better understand the reasons behind existing disparities and how we can address the barriers and obstacles facing girls and women with disabilities. This is critical for their full and effective participation and contribution to civil, political, economic, social and cultural life.
- Today's discussion will focus on the advancement of girls and women with disabilities, through promoting their access

to and participation in education and employment in the field of **science, technology, engineering and mathematics** [also referred to as STEM]. As we all know, science and technology is an important sector of the economy for countries at all levels of development.

- Without further ado, please let me introduce you to Ms. Stephanie Ortoleva, Senior Human Rights Legal Advisor at BlueLaw International. Until recently, Stephanie served as the Disability Coordinator at the U.S. Department of State and as the Executive Director of the Department of State's and USAID's Advisory Committee on Persons with Disabilities. She was the Department expert on global women's issues. She participated in all of the negotiations of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, serving on the United States governmental delegation. Ms. Ortoleva is an Adjunct Professor at the American University and is an Associate of the American University Centre for Global Peace. Additionally, she has a distinguished career as an attorney in civil rights litigation and policy development in government agencies and public interest organizations in the United States.
