**46th Session of the Human Rights Council**

**Agenda item 3**

**Joint Statement on World Autism Awareness Day**

**Delivered on Behalf of Poland, Qatar and 151 states - updated**

1. I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of Qatar and Poland. This statement has also been supported by 151 countries.
2. This statement is delivered on the occasion of the World Autism Awareness Day celebrated yearly on April 2 – thanks to the 2007 initiative of Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, UN Sustainable Development Goals’ Advocate. For 14 years now we have had this opportunity to recognize autistic people and to highlight the need to respect, protect, and fulfill their rights in order to ensure their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.
3. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action clearly states that special attention needs to be paid to ensuring non-discrimination, and the equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by persons with disabilities, including their active participation in all aspects of society.
4. We emphasize that the rights, perspectives and well-being of people with autism, and all persons with disabilities, are integral to the 2030 Agenda and its commitment to leave no one behind.
5. We note that autism is a lifelong condition that affects millions of people worldwide. It is very often misunderstood and still too many societies keep shunning people on the spectrum. This lack of understanding has a tremendous impact on people with autism, their families and communities.
6. The stigmatization and discrimination associated with autism constitute substantial obstacles to the fulfillment of the rights of autistic persons. We call public policy-makers in developing as well as donor countries to address this issue in a comprehensive manner.
7. This neurodevelopmental condition affects 1 in 68 young people, amounting to an estimated 1% of the world’s population. Once diagnosed, persons on the spectrum very often continue to face a variety of barriers, which effectively may deny them their rights and their freedom to make their own choices.
8. However, we must remember that autism does not end by reaching the age of majority. The majority of young adults on the autism spectrum experiences difficulties in successful transitioning to adulthood, whether by finding employment or pursuing further education. these barriers and discrimination have a profound impact throughout the life-course of autistic persons.
9. Those are the challenges pertaining to the times of peace. However, the situation is even more daring for persons with disabilities – including those on the spectrum – in times of war. We take note with appreciation the Security Council resolution 2475 proposed by Poland and the UK, which was the first document holistically looking at the situation of this marginalized group in armed conflicts.
10. We recognize that persons with disabilities are particularly affected by conflicts and post-conflict situations – violence, threat to life or health, impeded access to healthcare, education, rehabilitation and, in extreme cases, even to life-saving humanitarian aid.
11. In view of the current global challenges posed by the ongoing spread of Covid-19 pandemic, people with autism can be identified as being particularly impacted by this pandemic in terms of lack of access to needed services, medical supplies, employment, adequate standard of living and social protection. While we call on ensuring equitable, accessible and affordable health-care services, including access to COVID-19 vaccines, to all; we urge to take into account the needs of persons with disabilities when scheduling vaccination programmes.
12. We note that there has been some improvement in the past 10 years, notwithstanding the new challenges of the last year caused by the pandemic. Thanks to the awareness-raising initiatives of autistic people or their families, the options for people with autism have expanded considerably, from access to early intervention – which helps children get a good start – to provision of accessibility and support services in colleges, workplaces and independent living.
13. We need to translate this growing awareness into action and work together to take concrete steps to address the many barriers faced by people with autism, including in the post-COVID-19 recovery. It is essential to continue to consult with autistic persons of all ages, including children, to ensure their experiences and voice are heard and considered in providing appropriate educational, training and therapeutic support.
14. Persons with autism naturally have a wide range of abilities and different areas of interest. recognizing their talents is essential to create a truly inclusive society.
15. On World Autism Awareness Day, we should all stand up for the rights of autistic persons and speak out against discrimination and ensure they have the necessary support to be able to exercise their rights and fundamental freedoms.
16. The World Autism Awareness Day is about more than simply generating understanding; it is a call to action. Recognizing the value and humanity of people with autism, in this joint statement we call for greater access and opportunities for autistic persons, training for public administrators, service providers, caregivers, families and non-professionals to support the integration of persons with autism into society so that they can realize their full potential for the benefit of all.

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