**Human Rights Council 43rd session
Annual Panel on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities:
Awareness raising and attitude changing training under Article 8
of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
6 March 2020**

Intervention by *Mr. Ishumael Zhou*, on behalf of the International Disability Alliance

Thank you Chair for giving me the floor.

On behalf of the International Disability Alliance, I would like to thank the Human Rights Council for organizing this interactive debate with the participation of persons with disabilities. We further appreciate the report prepared by the OHCHR which comprehensively states vital views and understanding of awareness-raising in relation to the spirit of the CRPD.

As we all know, the UNCRPD clearly marks the paradigm shift towards a human rights-based approach to disability. An approach that, regrettably, is yet to be fully understood and implemented, with laws and policies that too often relies on the charitable and medical models to disability in many parts of the world.

While all the articles of the CRPD are equally important, the adoption of a stand-alone provision on awareness raising, namely Article 8, is indicative of the fundamental role attached to fostering attitudinal change. Indeed, improving mutual understanding and acceptance in the society is paramount to tackle those assumptions, stereotypes and misconceptions that are at the basis of human rights violations and discrimination based on disability.

Even the wording of Article 8 clearly echoes the significance of awareness-raising. Differently from other articles, Article 8 does not merely call upon States parties to take all appropriate or necessary measures, but rather to take *immediate, effective and appropriate measures* on awareness raising. This is a recognition that all the other articles of the convention cannot be fulfilled unless comprehensive awareness measures are put in place.

I will not dwell on the importance of awareness raising, but we shall realise that information is power. About 40 years ago, a celebrated author analyst of global trends, John Naisbitt, observed that: “The new source of power is not money in the hands of a few, but information in the hands of many.”

Indeed, when we engage in comprehensive awareness raising on the rights of persons with disabilities, using multiple and complementary channels of communication, we put information in the hands of as many people as possible, and allow them to make informed decisions on disability inclusion and take proactive action to address stigma, stereotypes and harmful practices against people with disabilities.

And the added value of involving persons with disabilities in these activities is straightforward:

* It enhances the credibility of the activities and programs, and legitimates the active role of persons with disabilities in the community.
* The opportunities for persons with disabilities to narrate their life experiences, will emphatically engage the public in mutual identification and understanding.
* The involvement of persons with disabilities will further mobilise support and resources and channel them to priority areas.

Effective and comprehensive awareness raising, as laid out in Article 8, holds the key to the successful implementation of the UNCRPD, and to ensuring the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities in all spheres of social, economic, political and cultural life.

In view of the crucial role of this article, IDA calls out to States parties to:

* Review legislation to ensure that no provision perpetuates stigma and discrimination towards persons with disabilities
* Enact legal measures addressing and sanctioning hate crimes, hate speech and harmful practices against persons with disabilities, as well as the use of derogatory language and behaviours
* Adopt, in consultation with persons with disabilities and their representative organizations, a comprehensive national strategy on disability awareness raising, aiming at combating stereotypes, prejudices, harmful practices, especially those focusing on persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities, and promoting awareness of their rights
* Promote positive perceptions and messages of persons with disabilities as rights-holders, focusing on their dignity, capabilities and contributions to society through campaigns targeting the general population, schools, public officials, the private sector and educational institutions.
* Support OPDs in strengthening their capacity to effectively mobilise individuals with disabilities as country champions in awareness raising for national advocacy, following a human rights-based approach.

The list of platforms that can be used to raise awareness is endless, from newspaper to television programs and social media, to workshops, capacity building programs and training. For example, IDA leads training worldwide on the CRPD and on the SDGs reporting, as well as on CRPD and SDGs together with the International Disability and Development Consortium (IDDC) through the BRIDGE CRPD-SDGs initiative, with 86% of facilitators being persons with disabilities.

Targets of awareness-raising are endless as well, from community leaders to the private sector and the government; from media representatives to civil society, activists, opinion leaders, and persons with disabilities themselves.

We need to make use of all of those platforms to reach everyone, because every member of our societies, including persons with disabilities, has a role to play in ensuring that no-one is left behind.