## ****Social Forum 2016****

## ****October 3-4****

**Side Event: Participation of women with disabilities in decision-making processes**

**Sophia Pierre - Antoine, YWCA of Haiti and World YWCA - Youth perspective**

**\*Transcript:** Hello, thank you so much for having me on this panel. It’s incredible to be sitting next to such amazing leaders and so beautiful to see how many people are in this room today, thank you for taking the time to come. It’s also very humbling to have been asked to speak.

The YWCA movement focuses on the empowerment of young women and girls, through community led capacity building and participation at local, national, regional, and international advocacy events, always with a human rights based approach. I come from Haiti and to give you a snapshot of my country, the population is currently at around 10 million, and the number of people living with disabilities ranges between 800 000 to 1.1 million, according to WHO and government statistics. That’s around 10%. It increased significantly in the recent years due to the 2010 earthquake, and continues to do so after every crises such as the Hurricane Matthew, which is currently creating havoc in Haiti as we speak. The government also reports that less than 3% of children living with disabilities attend school.

Young women and girls living with disabilities, especially in low income and poor settings are treated as a pariah and as a result are kept behind closed doors and out of school doing domestic work, are sometimes abandoned, or sent to live with relatives who have a bit more economic means as a form of non-formal child early and forced marriage, which leads to high cases of sexual and physical abuse. As some of you might have heard, in March of this year, 3 young women were murdered near Haiti’s capital. These young women lived in a city built with the specific purpose of being a safe haven for people living with disabilities after the earthquake. They were murdered on their way back from a day’s work in the capital’s marketplace. Investigations showed that the cause of this heinous act was mystical beliefs. In some cities and rural areas of Haiti the Mute, Deaf & Blind population are believed to be cursed, manifestations of mythical creatures and dangerous spirits, meaning less than human and something to be feared, hidden, or eliminated.

So how can we challenge that? Through meaningful and inclusive participation of young women and girls living with disabilities at all levels and in decision making processes. Meaningful and inclusive participation means that we no longer can accept excuses as to why differently abled young women and girls in the communities that we all live in are not included. As we acknowledge that differently abled young women and girls face barriers we must ensure that opportunities to contribute to the drafting, implementation and evaluation of projects and of participating in the drafting of policies, legislations and campaigns through innovative, creative, and engaging consultancies and activities are created and encouraged. Young women and girls living with disabilities must participate in initiatives seeking to increase employment rates and access to education, for example, building accessible schools and bathrooms for girls, having school material adapted and rendered accessible and hosting and reinforcing no discrimination policies and sensitivity trainings in the workforce and for the service industry. To achieve this, young women and girls look towards older women and the older generations in intergenerational dialogues, and two way mentorships, in order to learn from each other and create sustainability.

Government and international efforts to mainstream gender should go hand in hand with the efforts to integrate a disabilities lens. The two can’t be separate if we truly want to leave no one behind. In Haiti, access to services, resources, education and employment are extremely limited due to stereotypes, stigma, and lack of targeted budgeting, data, and programmatic focus. It is therefore critical that efforts on sexual and reproductive health and rights, right to education, right to economic empowerment, to political participation and the fight against gender based violence, and child early and forced marriage mainstream disability rights and policies on all levels. Not doing so can be extremely damaging and will not be sustainable. For example, last year the government adopted a National Plan for Gender Equality that Ministry of Women’s Affairs fought hard for, however, young women and girls living with disabilities were not thoroughly consulted. This led to targeted efforts being omitted from the strategy 2014- 2020, which serves as a stepping stone for the next 20 years. Thankfully, CSOs for and by women with disabilities are fighting back and have been vocal about the need for the Plan to be amended.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) that came into force in 2008 was adopted by Haiti. However, in their 2009-2013 report, little focus on women, girls, and children is given. I am still hopeful that my country will continue using the CRPD to provide the necessary actions for persons with disabilities while actively including a gender mainstreaming lens with meaningful and inclusive participation of young women and girls living with disabilities.

Thank you for giving me time to speak and I’m greatly looking forward to the interventions by the other panelists and also from the participants today to hear your thoughts about how we can strengthen the gender and disabilities perspective.