**Jose Maria Vierra**

**Respondent**

**‘Where do we stand’**

Excellences, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for giving me the floor.

I would like to briefly share with you all our journey to this room today.

Fifteen years ago we had not been included in the Millennium Development Goals. We were left behind. But today the 2030 Agenda offers an inclusive vision for the next 15 years, and we are recognised as stakeholders in its implementation.

We have worked to engage in every step of the process to make sure we would not be left behind again. We are here to help define and design the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals with you, as equal partners.

It has not been an easy journey to this room. The most frequent barrier persons with disabilities and our representative organisations faced was a lack of opportunities to participate meaningfully in the processes for decision-making on implementation, follow-up and review. Many of us asked for better dialogue and engagement opportunities between governments and organisations of persons with disabilities: responses were extremely varied. In some cases, our engagement was substituted completely by government agencies.

We also faced a lack of access to information within our countries. There is a real danger that without formal and sustained outreach and information sharing, civil society consultations will entrench and even exacerbate existing inequalities within civil society. There has to be greater effort to reach out to and engage with a wider variety of groups, especially those facing multiple discrimination, such as women with disabilities and indigenous persons with disabilities. So far we have seen that the translation of the SDGs to the grassroots level is entirely missing. This is a real concern.

But we have worked with others in civil society, and with many of you in Member States, in creating these Sustainable Development Goals and in bringing us all into the process of their implementation.

It is clearly very early days. And we are indeed, finally, here in this room with this important opportunity to share with each of you our decades of experience, our diverse perspectives, and our hopes for a better future. So please allow me to make some specific recommendations for the 2016 High-level Political Forum:

* First: Member States should involve and hold frequent consultations with civil society on SDG implementation.
* Second: Accessibility criteria for persons with disabilities should be addressed at the national, sub-national and local levels, such as universal design, translation and interpretation, accessible formats and assistive technology.
* And finally: Let us participate. Comprehensively, meaningfully and continuously, as equal contributors in realising this vision - of fully inclusive societies - leaving no one behind.