To,

H.E. Mr. Antonio Guterres
Secretary General of the United Nations

Your Excellency,

The International Disability Alliance, the Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities and the International Disability and Development Consortium – representing Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and disability organizations from across the globe, including the global South, write to express our profound concerns regarding the Impact Coalitions launched at the United Nations Civil Society Conference.

As an alliance of organizations representing persons with disabilities, alongside our partners in civil society, we are committed to ensuring the principles of inclusivity, accessibility, and equitable representation for persons with disabilities are achieved in all UN processes. In September 2023 the Political Declaration of the High-Level Political Forum stated: “We commit to ensuring that persons with disabilities actively participate in and equally benefit from sustainable development efforts.”. We are therefore concerned by the approach being established which seems to be moving away from the Major Groups and Other Stakeholders (MGoS) system as well as the absence of a disability-specific Impact Coalition which would call into question that vital commitment.

Currently, the Impact Coalitions suffer from vaguely defined mandates and unclear strategic intentions, which pose significant challenges. This lack of clarity in their roles and sustainability, coupled with insufficient integration into the broader UN agenda, risks marginalizing essential stakeholders. Consequently, the potential influence of civil society on global governance is being severely undermined.

A particularly glaring issue is the absence of a clear framework that articulates the specific role of the representative voice of 1.3 billion persons with disabilities. This omission not only challenges the credibility and legitimacy of the Summit of the Future but also perpetuates patterns of exclusion—patterns we had hoped were relics of the past. In this context, we emphasize the critical importance of the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which mandate active involvement and participation of persons with disabilities through their representative organizations in decision-making processes for UN entities and Member States respectively.

Moreover, the process surrounding the Impact Coalitions overlooks the ongoing contraction of space for civil society, potentially exacerbating this alarming trend. It also disregards the
historical involvement of persons with disabilities in international development processes. We recall the Millennium Development Goals' failure to include disability in their targets and indicators, a shortfall that was rectified in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through explicit inclusion. This progress was achieved through the active participation of organizations representing persons with disabilities.

The establishment of the Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities for Sustainable Development (SGPwD) in 2016 under the MGoS mechanism marked a significant advancement in formalizing the participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in UN processes. The SGPwD has played a crucial role in ensuring that disability rights are comprehensively addressed within the UN's sustainable development agenda and other sustainable development processes.

Now is not the time to sideline the MGoS framework or the SGPwD. Instead, it is a critical moment to strengthen these mechanisms to better serve all, particularly the most marginalized.

In light of these concerns, we urge an immediate dialogue to reassess and realign the Impact Coalitions with the fundamental values and objectives of the United Nations and ensure they add value to the MGoS framework rather than weakening it. We also call for the provision of adequate resources to ensure the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in all processes. This includes not only physical accessibility but also necessary resources like sign language interpretation, accessible information, and technology. This is especially timely because persons with disabilities encountered numerous accessibility barriers at the United Nations Civil Society Conference despite requesting accommodations well in advance and thus did not have equal access to the event.

We appreciate your attention to these urgent matters and await your prompt consideration. Together, we have the opportunity to enhance the inclusivity, equity, and effectiveness of the UN framework, ensuring it truly represents and serves all members of our global community.

Thank you for your consideration.

Dom Haslam, IDDC Chair

Jose Viera, Interim Executive Director IDA

Co-chair SGPwD