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**Statement submitted by Voice of Specially Abled People, Inc.
in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council***

The Secretary-General has received the following statements, which are being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

Statement

The COVID-19 pandemic presented many challenges, especially towards Persons with Disabilities. Suddenly faced with limited access to caregivers, they had the added burden of limited financial resources and diminishing livelihood due to a lack of work and, for some, even begging at public places. With many unable to access personal hygiene kits and resources as necessary as food and groceries, nearly 15% of the global population faced immense exclusion and survival challenges. The rest of the world also experienced glimpses of the challenges of isolation that persons with disabilities often encounter.

On the flip side, the world figured out ways to work, learn, and interact virtually. Technology adoption transformed the way we live post COVID-19 **forever**, making this long-awaited practice a “**new norm**” now. Voice of Specially Abled People (VOSAP) believes that, although the pandemic had a detrimental impact, it has presented a far bigger, unprecedented and sustained opportunity to mainstream 1 billion Persons with Disabilities, accelerating implementation of the UN SDGs by 2030. The world can harness the opportunities presented by remote learning and working, thereby providing a level playing field for Persons with Disabilities who may have challenges to commute. VOSAP has accelerated its Enablement program to equip them with Assistive Devices to learn, earn and live in an inclusive, post-pandemic society, thereby accelerating SDGs, a far more realistic scenario post COVID-19.

During the pandemic, VOSAP reached out to more than 6500 persons with disabilities to provide groceries and personal hygiene kits, in addition to organizing mass vaccination events, improving Good Health and Well-Being (SDG 3). Through its flagship Art from Heart initiative, VOSAP engaged more than 4200 artists to promote inclusion for persons with disabilities through art. VOSAP also developed a robust platform for a virtual 3-D exhibition on assistive technology which is now visited by more than 14,000 people (SDG 9). Lastly VOSAP led a remote internship to amass compelling data points on persons with disabilities to formulate policy recommendations.

While working to accelerate recovery from the pandemic, VOSAP is enabling remote education by providing assistive devices such as smartphones, KIBO hardware for the visually impaired (SDG 4). VOSAP is also providing devices such as sewing machines, wheelchairs, hearing devices and tricycles, at no cost and created a job portal for persons with disabilities, thereby increasing employment opportunities that drive Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8), which will substantially reduce inequalities (SDG 10) and bring us closer to No Poverty (SDG 1).

VOSAP encourages everyone to learn more about emerging opportunities with the power of assistive technology in a virtual world.

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