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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

Thank you Mr. President and distinguished leaders from around the world. Good morning to all of you and good afternoon and evening to everyone watching us live on UN TV. I am Manushri Desai. I am honored to represent Voice of Specially Abled People, an NGO founded by a polio survivor Pranav Desai and an organization in Special Consultative Status with the UN ECOSOC, at the 2023 ECOSOC High Level Political Forum.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented many challenges, especially towards Persons with Disabilities. Suddenly faced with limited access to caregivers, persons with disabilities had the added burden of limited financial resources and diminishing livelihood with many unable to access necessities such as food and medicines. Nearly 15% of the global population faced increased exclusion and survival challenges.

On the flip side, the world figured out ways to work, learn, and interact virtually. We all witnessed accelerated technology adoption that transformed the way we live post COVID-19 **forever**, making these virtual practices to earn and learn a “**new norm**.” Voice of Specially Abled People (VOSAP) believes that, although the pandemic had a detrimental impact, it has presented a far bigger, real, sustained opportunity to accelerate achieving Sustainable Development Goals by mainstreaming over 1 billion Persons with Disabilities with remote education and employment.

During the pandemic, VOSAP provided groceries, personal hygiene kits, and access to vaccinations, improving Good Health and Well-Being (SDG 3) for more than 6,500 Persons with Disabilities. Through its flagship Art from Heart initiative, VOSAP engaged more than 4,200 artists to think about disability and, through its virtual 3-D assistive technology exhibition, engaged more than 14,000 people with assistive technology (SDG 9).

While working to accelerate recovery from the pandemic, VOSAP has expanded its impact to 13 states in India by enabling remote education by providing assistive devices such as smartphones, Daisy players, and KIBO hardware for individuals with visual impairment (SDG 4) and providing sewing machines, wheelchairs, hearing devices and tricycles, at no cost. This has increased employment opportunities, driving Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8) to substantially reduce inequalities (SDG 10) and bring us closer to No Poverty (SDG 1).

VOSAP would like to share its resources and digital tools to collaborate with the global community. Together, let us accelerate achieving the SDGs by harnessing unprecedented opportunities for more than 1 billion Persons with Disabilities in a post-COVID 19 world where remote education and employment are the new norm. Thank you.