

Pacific Disability Forum  
Setareki Macanawai, Chief Executive Officer

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, all protocols observed;

I represent the Pacific Disability forum, International Disability Alliance and the Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities. WHO reported in March 2023 that an estimated 1.3 billion people experience significant disability, representing 16% of the world's population, or 1 in 6 of us.

The Conference has rightly recognized that the next ten years are critical for SIDS, and that the global agenda for sustainable development cannot be fulfilled without ensuring that there is strong support from the international community for SIDS to face the emerging economic, social, environmental and geopolitical threats. However, our approach to addressing issues faced by SIDS cannot be a one size fits all. We must recognize the multiple intersecting forms of discrimination faced by communities facing disproportionate risks of marginalization. Disability lies at the intersection of gender, age, racial, indigenous identities, among others, placing persons with disabilities as the most marginalised group in SIDS.

References to persons with disabilities in the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS include focus on inclusive social protection, increasing investment in inclusive education, and disability inclusive whole of government and whole of society approach is welcomed. Notably, para 25 (iii) (e) recognizes the critical need to 'Promoting and protecting the full realization of the human rights of persons with disabilities, and enabling their full, equal, meaningful and effective participation, representation and leadership in decision making, addressing stigma and discrimination, eliminating violence, and increasing their access to economic opportunities, education and health care.'

These commitments must be matched by strong actions including targeted funding, disability disaggregated data and in-built frameworks that allow for strong and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations. Universal Design must be at the center of our interventions.

The Summit of the Future where member states will adopt the Pact for the Future will happen soon. It is important that the concerns of persons with disabilities reflected at this SIDS conference get the same attention in September. All ongoing negotiations across the different processes must be coherent in their approach towards inclusion of and equity for persons with disabilities, we can no longer be working in silos. That only perpetuates the cycle of exclusion. Excellencies, we cannot hope for a resilient prosperity for anyone without breaking this cycle.