

**JOINT STATEMENT ON INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR PERSONS WITH
DISABILITIES DELIVERED ON DECEMBER 8, 2021
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Mr. Speaker, we are most grateful for the privilege to make this statement.

Mr. Speaker, today being the 3rd of December 2021 commemorates the International Day of Persons with Disability and the theme for this year's campaign is "Leadership and participation of persons with disability towards an inclusive, accessible and sustainable post covid19 world".

We stand in here on behalf of both Caucuses of the House to make the following joint statement as we join the world to mark the day to promote the rights and well-being of persons with disability, and as much as possible highlight the success and adequacies in our efforts as a nation to shaping an inclusive future for all.

Mr. Speaker, disability is part of human experiences and a proximal antecedent of accidents. It is important we understand accident as any natural or unnatural happenings that cause a malfunctioning to our abilities as humans. Consistent with this understanding, the World Health Organisation and the World Bank in a study in 2011 suggest that at one point or another, almost every person is exposed to, and may experience temporal or permanent disability.

Here in Ghana, approximately 4 out of every 10 persons have some form of disability condition according to the Ghana Disability Data Disaggregation Pilot Project in 2018. A study conducted by the Ghana Federation of Disability (GFD) in six regions in Ghana further indicates that 25% of persons with disabilities were born with the condition whilst 75% acquired their disabilities on earth. The plethora of evidence appear to amplify the pervasiveness of disability conditions in our societies.

Mr. Speaker, disability evokes different social constructions depending on the setting in which the concept is used. Ghana has several legal provisions that are meant to protect socially disadvantaged people including persons with disability whose rights and freedoms to overall equity and non-discrimination at any level are well guaranteed. Within the context of these provisions, we have as a nation formulated and pursued several policy interventions to minimize the challenges facing persons with disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, Article 29 of the 1992 Constitution of the republic of Ghana clearly espouses the rights of person with disabilities. Several other national laws including the Children's Act 1998 (Act 560), the National Health Insurance Act 2012 (Act 852) the Labour Act 2003 (Act 651), Pre-tertiary Education Act 2020 (Act 1046), among others, equally seek to protect the rights of persons with disabilities in Ghana.

Mr. Speaker, in 2006, the Parliament of Ghana passed the Persons with Disability Act 2006 (Act 715) which appeared to be a preeminent disability specific legislation in Africa. The Act seeks to protect the rights of persons with disabilities and promote their effective participation in society at all levels. Among other things, Act 715 provides for rights such as unrestricted access to public places and buildings, free health care, employment, education and transportation.

The law allows for a 10-year moratorium, within which all public buildings were expected to be made accessible for all including persons with disabilities. Unfortunately, the Ghana Accessibility Standards for the Built Environment developed by the Ghana Standards Authority with input from the disability Community been rendered a mere rhetoric.

Mr. Speaker, Ghana ratified the United Nations Convention Rights of Persons with Disabilities, an international human rights treaty of the United Nations, intended to protect and promote the rights and dignity of all persons with disabilities which came after Act 715. Article 4(b) of the Convention obliges Ghana as a state party to take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices that constitute discrimination against persons with disabilities and in order that they are in conformity with the present convention. As a signatory to the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, 1969, we as a country cannot derogate what we have ratified.

Mr. Speaker, Ghana Federation of Disability Organisations in partnership with Law and Development Advocates in 2013 conducted a gap analysis whose report indicates that the Disability Act needs serious amendment due to critical gaps which poses significant challenges to persons with disabilities.

At present, the rights of all persons with disabilities are not fully recognized and actively protected. As long as the Act remains in its present state, persons with disabilities, especially women and girls, as well as the aged will continue to suffer many forms of hardship in their social lives, and what ought to be considered as a

matter of protecting the social rights of persons with disabilities will be seen as social welfare provision.

Mr. Speaker, the African Disability Protocol ensures that no one is truly left behind. It is unique to the continent and takes African practices and concerns into consideration so that the lives of people with disabilities improve. It addresses the ingrained issues of disability discrimination to ensure everyone can access health, education and employment without stigma or barriers.

The ratification of the African disability protocol by government would not only address the contextual issues of harmful practices affecting persons with disabilities but also foster the inclusive development agenda which underscores the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Ghana is highly regarded as a pacesetter among the comity of African countries for which reason many AU members states would potentially be encouraged to do same once Ghana ratifies the protocol (after Mali and Kenya) in order to achieve the 15 ratifications needed for the protocol to come into effect.

Mr. Speaker, the Inclusive Education Policy of 2015 is anchored on the 1992 Constitution, the national development agenda, Ghana's Education Strategic Plan 2018-2030 and other international imperatives with the view to creating the enabling environment for addressing the diverse educational needs of Ghanaians including persons with disabilities. The policy has been reviewed but appears to be facing limited implementation fidelity and requires significant interventions for effective implementation

Mr. Speaker, during the Global Disability Summit in 2018, Ghana through the Minister for Gender, Children and Social protection, made eight commitments aimed at removing specific barriers that work against the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all levels of development.

The eight commitments are:

- to eliminate stigma and discrimination against persons with disabilities
- to promote inclusive education
- to ensure routes to economic empowerment of persons with disabilities
- to harness technology and innovation to better the lives of persons with disabilities
- to build disaggregated data on persons with disabilities to inform policy formulation and implementation

- to make adequate provisions for women and girls with disabilities on account of the double discrimination; and
- mainstream disability into conflict and humanitarian responses; and ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities.

Mr speaker, government has attempted to facilitate the achievement of these commitments by providing over twenty thousand (20,000) wheelchairs to the Ghana Federation of Disabilities Organisation, providing students living with disability in selected tertiary institutions with assistive technology-enabled devices and training to promote their digital inclusion; distributing 240 fit-for-purpose gender and disability friendly school sanitation facilities to over 23, 870 school pupils of low-income communities in the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area (GAMA) through the GAMA Sanitation and Water Project, in addition to several ongoing interventions to improve their livelihoods and wellbeing.

Mr Speaker, despite the foregoing successes, there is an urgent need for the National Council on Persons with Disabilities to be well resourced and decentralized to perform its functions well to ensure proper mainstreaming of disability issues in all sectors and at all levels.

Section 41 of Ghana's Persons with Disability Act (act 715) established the National Council on Persons with Disability as a state agency responsible for all disability related issues. The objective of the Council is to propose and evolve policies and strategies to enable persons with disability enter and participate in the mainstream of the national development process at all levels.

The Council is expected to monitor and evaluate disability policies and programmes, formulate strategies for broad-based inter-sectoral, interdisciplinary involvement and participation in the implementation of the national disability policy as well as play an advocacy role on disability issues at all levels. Since the establishment of the council in 2009, it is yet to have offices beyond the national capital and it is inadequately resourced.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to bring to this august house the barriers that are impeding the full inclusion and effective participation of persons with disabilities which are still on the rise and are limiting persons with disabilities of their full potential and access to society.

We are optimistic that drawing the attention of the house will start a nationwide dialogue, not just on policy implementation but how as Ghanaian we can be more sensitive, more accommodating and more conscious of persons with disability and fully include them in the development of our dear nation Ghana.

We thank you Mr. Speaker for the gracious indulgence. It is our hope that you will refer this statement to the Ministry of Gender Children and Social protection as well the appropriate parliamentary committee for further action.

Most grateful.