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**49th Human Rights Council**

**Interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur**

**on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

**14 March 2022**

**Statement by Austria, Croatia, Slovenia**

Thank you Mister President.

I deliver this statement on behalf of Austria, Croatia and Slovenia.

As the new and emerging technologies rapidly change our world, reaching all spheres of life, development of adequate legal framework often lags behind. In this sense, the expert work of international and regional institutions, such as UN, CoE and others provides valuable guidance and enables strategic and proactive approach.

We commend the Special Rapporteur for his report, which presents a comprehensive study of numerous opportunities, that digital transition can bring to the lives of persons with disabilities, as well as unique and disproportionate risks it can impose on their enjoyment of human rights.

The benefits of AI in the advancement of disability rights are well known. However, as highlighted, new technologies are not always beneficial or neutral. The growing evidence shows that AI often fuels discrimination, posing risks to full enjoyment of the right to privacy, education, work, health or participation in political and public affairs.

The lack of transparency behind machine-made decisions certainly represents one of the biggest threats in countering potential discriminatory practices.

It is of vital importance that a human rights-based approach to the whole life cycle – the design, development, deployment, purchase and use of new and emerging digital technologies is implemented and the AI systems provide persons with disabilities support and assistance.

Our countries are committed to strengthening social and economic inclusion envisaged in the Sustainable Development Goal 10. Improving the access to digital products and services and building digital skills, as well as developing appropriate applications are all essential preconditions to bridging the digital divide. Moreover, the engagement of persons with disabilities in technology development process, as well as political decision-making, remains crucial in order to ensure that their voices are heard and their specific needs are taken into account.

Mr. Quinn,

Armed conflicts, such as the one in Ukraine, force millions of people to leave their homes and become refugees. Particularly vulnerable are refugees with disabilities. Could you elaborate on possible role the AI could have in their support and protection?

Thank you.