WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY
2 April 2020

On World Autism Awareness Day, we recognize and celebrate the rights of persons with autism. This year’s observance takes place in the midst of a public health crisis unlike any other in our lifetimes — a crisis that places persons with autism at disproportionate risk as a result of the coronavirus and its impact on society.

Persons with autism have the right to self-determination, independence and autonomy, as well as the right to education and employment on an equal basis with others. But the breakdown of vital support systems and networks as a result of COVID-19 exacerbates the obstacles that persons with autism face in exercising these rights. We must ensure that a prolonged disruption caused by the emergency does not result in rollbacks of the rights that persons with autism and their representative organizations have worked so hard to advance.

Universal human rights, including the rights of persons with disabilities, must not be infringed upon in the time of a pandemic. Governments have a responsibility to ensure that their response includes persons with autism. Persons with autism should never face discrimination when seeking medical care. They must continue to have access to the support systems required to remain in their homes and communities through times of crisis, instead of facing the prospect of forced institutionalization.

We all have a role to play in ensuring that the needs of people who are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 are met during this difficult period. Information about precautionary measures must be provided in accessible formats. We must also recognize that when schools employ online teaching, students with non-standard ways of learning may be at a disadvantage. The
same applies to the workplace and working remotely. Even in these unpredictable times, we must commit to consulting persons with disabilities and their representative organizations, and ensuring that our non-traditional ways of working, learning, and engaging with each other, as well as our global response to the coronavirus, are inclusive of and accessible to all people, including persons with autism.

The rights of persons with autism must be taken into account in the formulation of all responses to the COVID-19 virus. On World Autism Awareness Day, let us stand together, support each other and show solidarity with persons with autism.