

19 November 2012

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremić,  
President of the 67<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly,  
at the High-level Special Event on Autism and Developmental  
Disabilities**

Excellencies,  
Distinguished Representatives,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Permanent Representative of Bangladesh, H.E. Dr. Abulkalam Abdul Momen, for hosting this event in support of the submission of a new General Assembly resolution on Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Doctors now believe that one in every 2000 children suffer from this malady which is much higher than previously thought.

With perhaps up to 70 million sufferers from around the world, it is a truly global health issue one that does not recognize geographic, economic or cultural borders. It strikes indiscriminately, and has an alarming impact on youngsters, their families, communities and societies.

Excellencies,  
Fighting autism is a cause in which my wife, Natasa, and I have taken a special interest. Earlier this year, in July, she together with H.R.H. Princess Katarina Karadjordjevic of Serbia hosted a visit by Madam Ban Soon-taek, the Secretary-General's spouse, at the Dr. Olga Hadzi Antonovic Autism Daycare Center in Belgrade.

Since its establishment in 1990, this facility has provided early diagnosis and treatment for autistic children in Serbia, as well as tending to their educational needs.

I believe that, thanks to the Dr. Olga Hadzi Antonovic center, a young person with autism living in Serbia now has a much greater chance of fulfilling his or her potential.

Individuals living with this condition have developed the social and communication skills they lacked, enabling them to lead more independent and productive lives.

Excellencies,  
The first World Autism Awareness Day was celebrated in April 2008, following the adoption of General Assembly Resolution 62/139. And earlier this year, the United Nations Postal Administration issued six commemorative postal stamps dedicated to autism awareness, featuring images created by artists who have been diagnosed with the disorder.

In launching those stamps, the Secretary-General said that they “send a powerful message [...] that talent and creativity live inside all of us.”

Whilst it is clear that knowledge is growing in certain parts of the world, the same cannot be said for many developing countries. I strongly believe that we need to act on this awareness gap. I wholeheartedly support the draft resolution proposed by the People’s Republic of Bangladesh on a coordinated global response to Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Unfortunately, medical expertise is lacking in many low- and middle-income Member States, hindering efforts to properly address the issue.

Children with developmental disorders and their families often face major challenges associated with isolation and discrimination, as well as a lack of access to adequate health care and education facilities. In many corners of the world, autism is as much a development as it is a health issue.

Supporting people with that condition will require a coordinated, multi-faceted approach at the global level. In my view, focus must be placed not only on awareness-raising, but also on building the capacity of healthcare providers to offer appropriate services.

Excellencies,

I strongly believe that the draft resolution proposed by Bangladesh will advance the interests and well-being of millions of autistic individuals and their families. It is critical, in my view, to actively involve the UN system in this endeavor, as well as engage with private sector, philanthropic, and civil society organizations. A funding mechanism will also need to be developed, as without adequate material support the objectives set forth in the draft resolution will be unattainable.

Throughout its history, the United Nations has promoted the rights and well-being of the disabled, including children with developmental disorders. As is well known, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities reaffirms the fundamental principle of human rights for all.

To help address these issues, a High-level Meeting of the General Assembly entitled “The way forward: a disability-inclusive development agenda towards 2015 and beyond” will take place at Heads of State or Government level at the beginning of the 68th session. In the near future, I will appoint facilitators for this event.

It is my hope that the General Assembly, through the draft resolution as well as the subsequent High-level Meeting, will become a true advocate for the rights of those suffering from autism.

In this way we shall further the aims of the UN Charter by reaffirming “faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person.”

Thank you for your attention.