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Dear Mmes. Héry and Baboo and Messrs. Haslam, Cuthbert and Vardakastanis,

I would like to thank you for your letter and your reminder about particular challenges that people with disabilities face across the world. It is both necessary and timely.

Firstly, let me warmly congratulate you for the excellent work that civil society organisations tirelessly carry out in partner countries to ensure that children and young people with disabilities can enjoy the same right and access to quality education as their peers.

Education is central to our objectives of equality, enhanced human development and poverty reduction. It is also a key enabler for sustainable economies and societies, responsible green and digital transformation, safe and orderly migration, rule of law, democracy and global peace and security.

COVID-19 has undone part of the progress made in human development over recent years, and has exacerbated pre-existing inequalities. Vulnerable groups, including learners with disabilities, have unfortunately taken a disproportionate toll.

In this context, it is my goal to ensure that funding for education in the forthcoming 7-year EU external budget reaches at least up to 10% of our investments in partner countries under my responsibility. This will represent a significant increase compare to the current budgetary period 2014-2020. This support will be delivered bilaterally to partner countries, to strengthen education systems and support civil society organisations, and multilaterally to global initiatives.

We believe that working at all levels of the education system is necessary. This means promoting normative changes, by encouraging legislation which opens access to education for children with disabilities, and raising social awareness, by working with communities to address stigma and misunderstanding about disability. This is particularly the case of children with disabilities living in countries affected by conflicts and crisis.

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Anne Héry - Director of Advocacy, Humanity & Inclusion  
Dominic Haslam - Chair of the International Disability & Development Consortium  
Nafisa Baboo - Director of Inclusive Education, Light for the World  
Chris Cuthbert - Director of Evidence, Advocacy and Campaigns, Lumos  
Yannis Vardakastanis - President, European Disability Forum With the support of: The Atlas Alliance

To ensure the full implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, I would like to inform you that the European Commission will present a new European Disability Rights Strategy in the near future, which will include our external action.

Let me assure you that we will continue advocating for the rights of people with disabilities in our policy dialogue with partner countries. Your voice in the promotion of this common goal is critical and I look forward to our continued cooperation.

Yours sincerely,



Jutta Urpilainen