**Introduction:** Stephanie Ortoleva

*There* … has *just* been an announcement about disability issues, *a* global women’s movement *mapping* report so I hope that you will all take an opportunity to take a look at that and if any of you have *business cards* with you Frank will help you collect those and if someone can lend us a piece of paper for those of you who don’t have business cards for the envelope perhaps we could ask you to just sign in with your name and your organisation and your email address if you wish, we would really like to have that information – so we’ll collect business cards and get your names. Again, I’d like to thank everyone for coming and I would especially like to thank my sister catalysts, some of whom travelled great *dis-goals* for *sign-lighting* disabled women and girls. Basically we were – many of us have been very concerned that the millennium development goals, which preceded the sustainable development goals, really did not have vigorous *components* directed specifically towards women and girls with disabilities. You know, some people say: “Oh well, you’re covered in gender goals and oh well, you’re covered in the disability goals.” but that is really not enough because the situation of women and girls with disabilities is very, is very unique and of concern to our gender and our disabilities. We need to consider these intersecting forms of discrimination as we discuss these various topics and so, with a specific focus on poverty in the context of the UK.

**Eleanor**

Hello everybody. As I was preparing for this talk, I thought that austerity has hit many parts of the world and it’s no different whether – it’s not that much different – whether you’re in the global north, or the global south. But poverty is comparative and we have to look at the social and economic context as well as geographic location. As Stephanie has already mentioned, there are also intersectional aspects to be considered: there is such diversity among disabled women, for example disabled women who have access to education, those who are white and middle class, those who live in metropolitan areas will be more advantaged than those who live in a rural area, who are women of colour and from the minority and who do not speak the mainstream languages. And those who are disabled from a young age are less advantaged from those who acquired disability later in life. And I should say here that I prefer to use the term ‘disabled women’ rather than ‘women with disabilities’ because I’m from the UK and we use the social model of disability, saying that it is the society with its environmental and attitudinal barriers that disables us, not necessarily our impairments. As for the UK, disabled women are reeling from the welfare cuts in the UK. It was five years ago – five, six years ago – the UK was a beacon for disability legislation, with the Disability Discrimination Act and later the Equality Act 2010, but now I fear that it’s more a case study for how a government has reduced many of its disabled population to near poverty status. Without going into various benefits I’m just going to give you an example, a case study, let’s say her name is ‘Jane’. Five years ago, Jane has a job. She has support in the form of an attendant who helps get her ready for work; she has a car that she rents from the government, it’s called ‘Motability’ and she has something called ‘Disability Living Allowance’ that helps her with the more expensive aspects of being disabled. So the government decides to have cuts and they change the criteria. First of all, they take her car away then, because they said that she didn’t deserve - she didn’t need one – because her disability isn’t enough to warrant having a car. So then she can’t get to work. They said: “Well, take a taxi.” – can you imagine? And then because she lost her job so she also lost her ability to pay her attendant and there is something in England called ‘Access to Work’ that helps you work with an attendant and because she lost her job she also lost her attendant and because of that, in the UK, there is also something called a ‘bedroom tax’ which means that because her attendant stays with her at night, so she has two rooms, and the bedroom tax says that she doesn’t warrant having an extra room and so she should pay extra. So she runs into debt – she runs into debt, the bailiffs come, she is made homeless and so she is – you know – in despair and she kills herself because she doesn’t know what to do. So, very quickly, I am going to quote some things from the newspaper and this is from ‘The Times – International Business Times’ on the 16th of March to say that the budget – this budget, this new budget : “The independence and lives of disabled people are being sacrificed for austerity …” and this is not from disabled people, this is not us who are saying it, this is, you know, this is ‘The Business Times’. So we have people and I’m not going to go into too fine *detail* because I’m running out of time, because there is this woman called Louise Cook who, before, used to collect and ship spare bags of donated clothes overseas to places like Nepal but nowadays she says she has to keep it for people in *Nottingham*. She says it’s like we live, now, in a developing world, but it’s the UK: what sort of society are we living in? So I give you a picture of the UK and people have said that we’ve gone back to Dickensian times so, yes.