**Introduction: Eleanor**

Okay – I think Alexia will have to catch up with us when she does get here, she’s just over at the UN building doing the conclusions. Hello everybody, welcome thank you for coming we realise this is the last day and so thank you very much for being with us. The title that we decided *on* today for this particular event is ‘A Dialogue: Survivors in a Disabling Environment: what does empowerment of disabled women mean globally?’ Now my name is Eleanor Lisney and I am on of the founding members of a disabled women’s collective in the UK. Oh, here is Alexia – come and join us, it’s ready for you. Are you all right? Let me start again. The title is ‘The Dialogue’ because we realised this was the last day and we thought that, you know, we could be a bit more informal. So it’s ‘Survivors in a Disabling Environment: what does empowerment of disabled women mean globally?” What I really wanted to do because when we put this panel together we realised that, for a lot of disabled women, it’s very difficult to come to New York firstly because a lot of us do not know about the accessibility and what are the possibilities and etc, and also because of the costs. So I had asked a few women all over different parts of the world to put a video, a little clip, together to say what it means to them. However when I arrived here I realised that first of all, in this room, it would be a bit difficult and secondly they wanted five hundred dollars for the projector, which we thought might not be a good idea. So what we’re going to do is, which is why we asked if you could put your name on the list, I’m going to put them all on YouTube so that you can access it when you get home and you can listen *to these* wonderful women talk about what it means to them because it means they can’t come. Okay. So without much ado let me start with introducing the panel. The way we’re going to do it is, each person has about five minutes to talk about their particular take on what empowerment means to them. And I’m going to start with Alexia and if she doesn’t mind I’m not going to go through the whole full name because I wouldn’t want to mis-pronounce. Alexia is the Deputy Minister of Disability Affairs in the office of the Vice President in Namibia and she champions those in rural areas, saying that disabled people have less resources because, than people in the cities. So Alexia will be talking on the status of disabled *women* in Namibia and her own empowerment as a Minister.

**Alexia**

Thank you very much Eleanor for that introduction. Yes, as you heard, my name is Alexia. Let me just start with myself and where I was born: I was born in a village in the northern part of Namibia called *Kaalvelt* and I have endured a lot of turmoils and discrimination associated with gender issues as a woman with disability because it was not taken seriously that a woman with disability can even pick up a broom and sweep the room and the house. I experienced unforgiving societal ills of discrimination and because it was also viewed as, other people with disabilities, were viewed as an outcast. But let me say in that all those days of the past cannot be compared to the *joy* we have today because in 2005 I was elected as a first woman Member of Parliament with disability under the leadership of our former President because our presidents have changed three times. Now we have another one so under that former president I had been elected as the Member of Parliament. Namibia is proportional representation led; I do not have any constituency to represent, I only represent the whole country Namibia but with the particular interest in disability issues. Growing up, I’ve grown up also within the ruling party, the *Ossopa* party and that I acknowledge has made me to have a commitment that the historical discriminatory tendencies have made it much stronger for me growing in that environment of the *Ossopa* party. Today for me it’s a great day because I’m a testimony to change because of women’s empowerment in my country because barely a year ago I was re-elected as a member of parliament and consequently the current president found it fit to appoint me as a deputy minister. The president is responsible for issues of disability. Among others, I’m representing the needs and aspirations of people with disabilities to look into their employment, to their empowerment of being in training, in education and also in employment. So we expect people with disabilities to be included in action plans of all the government offices and ministries to make sure that they include people with disabilities. Currently we have formed an inter-ministerial committee – the committee that will be looking at the empowerment of people with disabilities in general. As we know that many social issues, many social economic issues and political issues and environment, can disadvantage. People with disabilities have been disadvantaged for far too long and the experience, the experience by people with disabilities, are *influenced* by gender base, by discriminatory attitudes for women with disabilities in particular in Namibia. I can take an example: when I was, when we, were planning this CSW there was no consideration of people with disabilities to be taken on the delegation. Hence with this ministry or department that has been established by the president to look into the issues of disability people could still not understand the link of women with disabilities to CSW or gender issues to disability. They cannot see that link. But we, our department *we have worked hard* so that we can be included in this delegation and I am happy that I at least was included and this is only because of the poor planning. If it was planned properly we would have been more on this delegation – women with disabilities or even just people with disabilities in general, from the office. Currently what our office is doing we are planning, or we have already embarked upon, self-help programmes. We are trying to get people with disabilities, those who are *begging homeless* on the street, we want to try and get them out of the street, to empower them, to come up with some self-help projects and programmes that will empower people with disabilities. But these programmes or whatever projects they would like to do they have to plan for themselves. They have to tell us what kind of programmes do they want to *indulge* in. Our department, this one for another minister, the deputy minister, is relatively new, it was only established last year for the first time and that’s why I’m talking about planning. They are actually starting to plan now on these issues that will be empowering people with disabilities and we also would like to give them the self independence, the living, that’s why we were, why even I was talking to Eleanor, to say that I want to learn from the good practices in the UK for the independent living. Community based organisations – that will also come up with promoting independent living – those are the organisations that we want to work on and after we have also got enough information from others who are already dealing in this kind of empowerment problems. I think I will just stop there. Thank you very much indeed.