STATEMENT BY DR. ZANETOR AGYEMAN-RAWLINGS, HON MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR KLOTTEY KORLE CONSTITUENCY ON THE 2019 INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, 3RD DECEMBER, 2019

Mr. Speaker, today marks the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), a day set aside by the United Nations to promote empowerment and help create real opportunities for persons with disabilities also known as differently abled persons.

This day presents us the opportunity to reflect on this special segment of our population and examine the extent to which we have treated them or supported them to realize their full potential and also contribute to national development.

Mr. Speaker, when Ghana joined the rest of the world to adopt the global framework for sustainable development – the Sustainable Development Goals, we pledged to "leave no one behind". This pledge implies that government and all other stakeholders must take steps to ensure the protection of the rights of PWDs and make investments to empower them with jobs, adequate healthcare, nutrition, education and skills, and social protection. The only way to we can carry PWDs along is to empower them to take advantage of opportunities and work together to eliminate the barriers of stigmatization and discrimination.

Mr. Speaker, one of the best things this House did in 2006 was the passage of the Persons With Disabilities Act, 2006 (Act 715). Even though this law makes elaborate provisions for the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities, persons with physical, intellectual or emotional disabilities (PWDs) face social stigma as evidenced by inequalities in access to employment, education, healthcare and use of public places and facilities. Despite constitutional and legislative guarantees on the rights of persons with disabilities, the laws have not been adequately implemented and they therefore continue to face discrimination.
Mr. Speaker, thirteen years after the passage of the law, a number of public facilities remain inaccessible to PWDs even though the law enjoins the state and owners of public places to make them accessible to PWDS. Our public transport system also does not have facilities to support persons with disabilities. They face discrimination each day when they commute from one place to another hence they are mostly compelled to spend more on transportation by hiring taxis.

In the Budget Statement and Economic Policy for the 2020 financial year, the Minister for Finance stated, and I quote, "20 trainer of trainers were trained on the Ghana Accessibility Standard on the Built Environment Document to ensure that newly constructed public facilities as well as existing ones are disability friendly. In 2020, the Ministry will continue with the periodic training programmes." Encouraging as this may sound, I believe we need to accelerate the process to ensure that public facilities are made accessible to persons living with disabilities. This is long overdue.

Mr. Speaker, according to the 2010 Population and Housing Census, 130,000 children between the ages of 4-17 years have various degrees of disability and according to the Education Sector Analysis Report, 2018 the enrolment rate of children with disabilities is at a disappointing rate of 0.2 between 0.4 percent mostly because of inadequate facilities in schools to accommodate such children coupled with stigma they face. Discrimination against and exclusion of children with disabilities also put them at a higher risk of physical and emotional abuse or other forms of neglect, violence and exploitation.

Again, Mr. Speaker, even though Section 35 of Act 715 states that "The Ministry of Health in collaboration with District Assemblies and Ministry responsible for Social Welfare shall establish and operate health assessment and resource centres in each district and provide early diagnostic medical attention to mothers and infants to determine the existence or onset of disability," these facilities are virtually non-existent and a few that exist are under resourced.
Delays in implementation of the Disability Act and the limited consultation and involvement of PWDs in decision making have been cited as impediments to mainstreaming the needs of PWDs in the national development process. A case in point is poor consultation with PWDs in the disbursement of their share of the District Assemblies Common Fund. It is important to consult them on how the money should be disbursed.

The Disability Act makes provision for the establishment of a National Council on Persons with Disability (NCPD) to implement and coordinate the disability policy. However, the Council has been highly under resourced to do its work.

Mr. Speaker, as we commemorate this day, it is important to remember that disability is not a choice. We can do a lot more to support our brothers and sisters to empower them and make life more comfortable for them. We must not leave them behind. When we do so, we lose their invaluable contribution in national development and rather see them as a burden on the state.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance stated in this house whilst delivering the Budget Statement and Economic Policy that in 2020, a total of 1,000 women entrepreneurs with disability will receive training and funding to scale-up their businesses under the Presidential Empowerment for Women Entrepreneurs with Disability (PEWED) initiative. This initiative is laudable, however I will urge the government to scale it up to bring much needed relief to women entrepreneurs with disability.

I wish to urge the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection to take urgent steps to bring the Legislative Instrument to the House in order to operationalize the law. This will ensure the passage of a Legislative Instrument that will support the full implementation of the law, adequate sensitization of the general public to desist from marginalizing PWDs, retrofitting public places and make public services accessible to PWDS and providing and resourcing health facilities that will carry out early assessment and provide the necessary support to PWDS.