INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION
FOR SPINA BIFIDA
AND HYDROCEPHALUS

Dear esteemed delegates and participants, I salute you as a person living with Spina Bifida myself.

For this reason, being here today to speak about micronutrients, prevention, and rights is deeply personal to me. Because what we are discussing is not just a matter of public health, it is a matter of justice, equity, and human dignity.

For decades, the science has been clear: fortifying staple foods with folic acid is the most cost effective and moral policy to reduce the risks of neural tube defects, including spina bifida, guaranteeing a return on investment. This is no longer a theory. It is a proven fact.

IFSBH has long been at the forefront of this effort. Since the evidence emerged on the critical role of vitamin B9, we have worked incessantly to advocate for large-scale food fortification.

From a global perspective, 94 countries have now adopted legislation requiring the mandatory fortification of at least one industrially milled cereal. This success did not happen on its own. It is the result of collaboration between governments, grain millers, vitamin and mineral suppliers, international organizations, and academic institutions. It reflects a shift in thinking that fortification is no longer seen as a simple technical requirement but as a vital contribution to public health.

The adoption of WHA Resolution 76.19 marks a milestone in this regard and represents a transformation in how we address malnutrition and prevention and for the first time combines policies on health, nutrition and disability.

However its impact becomes visible only over the long term. Moreover, the fact that it requires substantial political change presents an additional barrier. These challenges cannot be tackled by civil society alone, they require coordinated efforts involving both public institutions and the private sector.

As the umbrella organisation for our global community, our mission is not only to prevent, but also to ensure that prevention is pursued with full respect for the rights of persons with disabilities.

This also means challenging harmful narratives. For too long, women have been left alone to bear the burden of preventing neural tube defects, facing blame, stigma, and isolation. This is no longer acceptable.

Me as a mother and having spina bifida, I do not blame my mother for my condition. Society must be considered responsible for creating healthy and protective environments for every child, starting from conception. And the WHA Resolution represents a first important step in this journey.

The first report on the implementation of this Resolution will be published in 2026. We have ‘still’, but also ‘only’ one year to act. This is the moment to step up our actions, foster effective implementation, and strengthen our advocacy efforts.

So today, I call upon you:

- To governments: Adopt strong national policies, rooted in scientific evidence and backed by communities.
- To the private sector: Become active partners in public health.
- To civil society: Keep raising the voices of those who live every day with the consequences of inaction.
- And to the global community: Do not forget that prevention does not exist without inclusion.

Each one of us can make a difference. Together, we make change happen.
A change in how we understand human rights based prevention not as a luxury, but as a right.

Thank you.