

Dear honourable delegates, distinguished panellists, and colleagues,

My name is Andela, and I speak to you today not only as a Youth Leader of the International Federation for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus, but also as a woman representing a generation calling for urgent, evidence-based, and rights-based action on malnutrition and preventable forms of disability.

To start, it is an honour to open this roundtable on *“Large-Scale Food Fortification and Multiple Micronutrient Supplementation: Progress and Promise to Address Malnutrition”*.

Today, we come together around one simple but powerful reality: malnutrition is preventable, and so are many of its lifelong consequences and inequalities.

Many of you here today represent ministries responsible for health, nutrition, agriculture, and social protection. And today, we are not discussing these issues in abstraction. We are discussing the policies, investments, and decisions that we make, that you make and that directly shape the lives of millions of people worldwide.

Around the world, millions of women and children still lack access to essential vitamins and minerals. Micronutrient deficiencies continue to affect health, development, education, and opportunity. And among the consequences are neural tube defects such as spina bifida, a condition that I live with.

For decades, the science has been clear: fortifying staple foods with folic acid is one of the most cost-effective and evidence-based public health measures to prevent neural tube defects, including spina bifida. This is no longer a question of knowledge; it is a question of implementation and scale.

Such action requires sustained investment, including domestic financing, technical expertise, and collaboration across sectors, with shared responsibility among governments, private and civil sector partners.

What gives me hope is that progress is happening. Countries across different regions are demonstrating leadership and showing that change is possible when collaboration becomes action. The momentum created through WHA Resolution 76.19 and today’s discussions shows that nutrition, prevention, maternal health, and disability inclusion are increasingly seen as interconnected priorities, calling for integrated health, nutrition, and disability-inclusive policies.

As a young advocate, I also want to emphasise something important: prevention must always go hand in hand with dignity, rights, and inclusion. Persons with disabilities must never be reduced to statistics or medical outcomes. We are advocates and leaders, we are students, professionals, parents, and active members of society. Policies should empower us and the various communities with disabilities and protect our rights, never reinforce stigma or exclusion.

Today's panel is an opportunity not only to reflect on progress, but also to strengthen commitment. Commitment to equity, science, partnership, and future generations.

As we begin this discussion, I hope it leads to stronger collaboration, greater investment, and concrete action to address malnutrition in all its forms, because every child deserves the healthiest possible start in life, and every community deserves policies that protect health, dignity, and fundamental rights.

I thank all Member States, partners, and organisations present today for your leadership and engagement.

Thank you.

Anđela Radovanović