

Speech
of
United Nations Special Rapporteur

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Inclusion International

*Building an Inclusive Future:
a Challenge for Globalization*

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I would like to begin by thanking Diane for inviting me to attend Inclusion International's 14th World Congress,

and I want to congratulate all of you for the great work that Inclusion has done in one of the most challenging areas of the rights of persons with disabilities,

that of including and integrating persons with developmental disabilities into the mainstream—

and by the mainstream, I do not only mean mainstream society, but the mainstream of the disability movement.

If we are to speak about discrimination and exclusion of persons with disabilities, we have to talk about the fact that persons with developmental disabilities have suffered from those at all levels.

Since starting my work as Special Rapporteur on Disability, I have had the honour of meeting a number of persons with developmental disabilities at international forums and at the United Nations in New York, who have spoken most eloquently about their experiences, and who have represented themselves and their issues with great ability.

I know that if it were not for the encouragement, support and advocacy of Inclusion International, we would not have heard this diversity of voices that has enriched the disability movement.

Still, I know that there is still a long way to go before the rights of persons with developmental disabilities are recognized in the same way as those of other persons with disabilities,

and before persons with developmental are allowed to speak for themselves and are heard as persons in their own right.

Looking at the results of the Global Survey on Government Action on the Implementation of the Standard Rules—which we conducted last year and whose results have just this month been analyzed and published—

I can see clearly that the rights and needs of persons with developmental disabilities have not been as well recognized,

Particularly in the area of education, accessible information and income support.

Let me take the liberty of sharing with you some of the findings in those areas:

Out of the 114 countries that responded to the Survey,

- 68 do not make information available in an accessible format for persons with developmental disabilities

While in

- 90 countries there are no reading materials available to persons with developmental disabilities

Additionally, in

- 36 countries there are no educational materials available, and in 41 children with developmental disabilities have no access to education
- in 27 countries parents of children with disabilities are neither involved nor consulted regarding the education of their children with developmental disabilities;

And

- in 50 countries, neither persons with developmental disabilities nor the families of children with developmental disabilities receive any income support or financial assistance.

Therefore, when I say that there is still a long way to go before the rights of persons with developmental disabilities are recognized, there are numbers and statistics which back up this claim.

Although this information is no revelation to all of us who have been working on disability rights, it is information that we can all use in our lobbying and advocacy activities, it is especially powerful information because it has been provided to us by governments themselves.

Despite the adoption of the Convention, and, even should all Member States sign and ratify it, our work will not be finished.

We know from previous experience with other human rights instruments, that a recognition of rights on the part of governments is not the same as the realization of those rights on the ground, at the national level, at the social level, at the local level, or the community level or even within individual homes.

Many have inquired about the Status of the Standard rules in the post-Convention world.

I believe the Convention will prove a powerful legal instrument to which governments will have to respond and which will serve very ably in strengthening the rights and addressing the violations.

But that does not mean that the Standard Rules have become obsolete.

In my opinion the adoption of the Convention has made the Standard Rules even more valuable.

While the Standard Rules solicited from the international community a moral and political obligation toward the issues of persons with disabilities, the Convention translated those issues into rights and solicited a legal commitment.

191 Member States adopted the Standard Rules, expressing their moral obligation to the issues and a political will to implement them. Both of those remain present, the Convention adds a legal cover and recourse.

The way I see it, the Standard Rules serve as a detailed checklist on what needs to be done and how it should be approached in order to ensure that the rights enshrined in the Convention are safeguarded.

The Global Survey broke down the Standard Rules into 402 and measures, when all of them combined are implemented, they would result in the an ideal world where equalization of opportunities is complete and across the board.

What the Global Survey also revealed is that no country in the world has achieved complete implementation of the Standard Rules, regardless of the resources available, the GDP, development levels, or the situation of human rights in the country.

For the most part, we have also learned that is not due to a lack of recognition of the rights of persons with disabilities, or the lack of a declared commitment to them,

but because we have yet to create a global culture of equalization of opportunities.

A culture of inclusion—which excludes no one.

In today's world, almost every group of people has had their human rights enshrined in treaties, conventions and agreements,

There has been global recognition of human rights in general,
children's rights,
women's rights,
minority right,
we have spoken globally against discrimination and prejudice, and exclusion

yet we have not succeeded in creating a world free of barriers and obstacles to full participation of all.

For persons with disabilities the adoption of the Convention, ends the struggle to create the legal framework for rights, and the legislative structure for the creation of a new culture.

Now, it is now time to fill this framework and strengthen the structure with the real change that affects people's lives.

The Convention represents the legalization of the spirit and philosophy of equalizations of opportunities and guarantees the inclusion of all persons with disabilities in the mainstream of society.

But it is also much more than that—

For equalization of opportunities to be truly meaningful it needs to include all members of society on an equal basis.

I believe that the challenge that the disability movement faces at this time, is to export the concept of equalization of opportunity to the global community.

This means expanding the philosophy of "what's good for us is good for all" to include all who will benefit from it, persons with disabilities, persons living in poverty, persons marginalized by discrimination and intolerance, persons whose rights have yet to be realized.

This requires a change not only in the legal structures, but in the social, cultural and economic spheres, as well as changes in our attitudes and behaviours, in outlook and point of view.

We still inhabit a world where poverty reduction strategies have produced only limited success,

And where poverty still contributes to and exacerbates disability

Where wars and armed conflicts increase disabilities daily

Where famine and environmental degradation leave thousands of children disabled—if they do not kill them

The disability movement, with its long history of struggle, with its vast experience in advocacy and with its premise of "what's good for us is good for all" and the spirit of equalization of opportunities, is capable of leading us all in the quest for a better world in which all people's rights are promoted and protected and where all violation may be addressed.

Thank you

I wish you greater successes always