

Chair,

This year the General Assembly has been presented important and disturbing reports on the situation for persons with disabilities, especially the situation for children. It remains a fact that although multiple efforts have been made to raise awareness about the necessity to include persons with disabilities in all programs and developments, substantial progress is yet to be seen. In reports from global development conferences, summits and their follow up, persons with disabilities are mostly overlooked.

This has also been the situation for the efforts to reach the Millennium Development Goals. The Goals can not be reached if the plans and programs aimed at fulfilling them are not designed to ensure the explicit inclusion of disability.

200 million children living with disabilities are reported to have inadequate access to health and education services, or support services. They miss out on vaccinations or simple treatment for easily curable diseases that become life threatening if left untreated.

Out of the 70 million children who do not attend primary school, approximately 23 million are children with disabilities.

These aren't merely frightening facts, but reality for 23 million children. Absence of action now leads to disabled people remaining illiterate, excluded from the labour market and living in poverty. A generation of people with disabilities unable to pursue life. Societies losing out on the great resources and potential of a whole generation.

Why do we accept these facts and figures?

Children with disabilities have the same rights and inherent dignity as every other child.

Children with disabilities must have the right to go the same schools as other children. Many countries throughout the world, including developing countries, have successfully implemented inclusive education.

The report on the MDG's and persons with disabilities, (A/66/128) draws our attention towards accessibility through innovative designs and cost-effective strategies. Accessibility is of vital importance and a prerequisite for an inclusive society. The Oslo conference identified one of the main challenges being rebuilding societies inclusive and universally designed after conflicts of war or natural disasters.

Costs and expenses related to building an inclusive society tends to be looked upon merely as that – expenses. But figures also show us that nothing is more costefficient than the inclusion of everyone in a society. A society emphasizing education and work for everyone will prosper. People with disabilities need education to qualify for work. Accessibility is a prerequisite for that.

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Recent data point out that an equity-focused approach to poverty reduction can be more effective than a general approach which does not take into account discriminatory policies. The equity-focused approach is especially cost-effective in low-income, high-mortality countries, where disability of one person may bring whole families into poverty. We face not only a challenge of dignity and ethics, but also a question of development economics and sustainability.

So, how do we transform this insight – as well as our commitment to universal human rights – into better policies for children living with disabilities?

A holistic, evidence-based and systematic approach is needed both within the UN system, and at country level. Only this way can we make progress for those millions of children with disabilities lacking basic education and access to health care. The international community should ensure that the Global Partnership for Education counters discrimination against children with disabilities. Another way of increasing the focus on this challenge is bringing the rights of these children into the hearings in the Universal Periodic Review in the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Lastly, the situation of children with disabilities is closely linked to women's rights and gender equality, and steps to improve the conditions of both groups will be mutually reinforcing.

This is not only the right thing to do, it is also smart economic politics.

Thank you