

Commission for Social Development Forty-eighth Session
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Statement of the Special Rapporteur on Disability of the Commission for Social Development, Mr. Shuaib Chalklen

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Members of the Commission, Ladies and Gentlemen;

It is a great honour for me to address you for the first time in my capacity as the Special Rapporteur on Disability of the Commission for Social Development.

I warmly welcome this opportunity to discuss my vision, priorities and action plans and to exchange ideas for implementation of the Standard Rules on Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities and the goal of the United Nations; human rights and development for all.

Before I begin my statement, I wish to express my great appreciation to my two predecessors: Mr. Bengt Lindqvist (Sweden) and Sheikha Hissa Al-Thani (Qatar). Their dedication and extraordinary contributions greatly advanced the equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities- I am honoured to follow their great examples.

I am starting my work by acknowledging that the position as a Special Rapporteur on Disability holds both great challenge and great responsibility. While much progress has been made through the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and increased efforts in promoting the disability-inclusive Millennium Development Goals, persons with disabilities- at least 10% of the world's population - still remain among the poorest of the world's citizens. And the current competing political, social and economic concerns make the needs of persons with disabilities all the more pressing.

My most recent mandate is based on ECOSOC resolution 2008/20, in accordance with the provisions in section 4 of the Standard Rules:

According to this mandate, the Special Rapporteur will:

1. Advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities in line with the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;

2. Create awareness of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,
3. Act as a catalyst to promote international and technical cooperation on disability issues, sharing of expertise, best practices, knowledge, information and relevant technologies for capacity-building of Member States;
4. Collaborate with all relevant stakeholders, including organizations of persons with disabilities;

The catalyst for the evolution of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur was the adoption of the World Programme of Action in 1982 and the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities adopted in 1993. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities that came into force in May 2008, builds on this, providing us with the strong legal basis to ensure that all persons with disabilities enjoy equal opportunities and respect for their fundamental freedoms and dignity. These are three core international disability instruments.

We are in the fortunate position of having 77 countries that have ratified the Convention and great many countries that have used the Standard Rules as a tool to develop the national policies, although the implementation of these policies remain a challenge. A growing number of Governments, legislators, and members of civil society beyond the disability community have begun to work with organizations of persons with disabilities, building broader constituency for advocating for the rights of persons with disabilities in society and development around the world.

In this context, my work and priorities are built on the three instruments on disability, relevant human rights and development instruments, including the Millennium Development Goals, other internationally agreed development goals and relevant international commitments and standards.

These historic developments brought about a change in the terms of reference of the Special Rapporteur, geared towards ensuring the utility of all the instruments to its optimal level.

I assume my position as the United Nations Special Rapporteur at a time when we have an enormous opportunity to bring about sustainable change in the conditions

of all persons with disabilities, with particular attention to Africa and other developing regions of the world. The situation of persons with disabilities in greater risk of poverty and marginalization requires urgent attention.

These opportunities and challenges have informed my vision for my term. And I am pleased to say that my vision is for a global situation of equal opportunities and the full participation of persons with disabilities in society and development, informed by international cooperation.

I intend to bring together the disability community, Governments, the United Nations system and civil society to promote this vision in practical action for a real change for persons with disabilities on the ground.

Since my appointment August last year, I have started to develop concrete ideas as to “how” I can translate this vision into action, starting with a conference in Cape Town organized for the African Decade of Persons with Disabilities. The conference in Cape Town shared information on the institutional mechanisms required at a national level to ensure the proper monitoring of the Convention.

This provided me with an opportunity to share my terms of reference with representatives from many African countries. I also attended the Rehabilitation International Middle East Regional Conference in Dubai in November 2009, where I had the opportunity to discuss one of my intended priorities – international cooperation. The conference in Dubai also gave me an opportunity to consult with members of governments and representatives from various organizations throughout the Middle Eastern region.

During the week of the International Day of Persons with disabilities – I was in Sweden, addressing the Swedish Parliament’s Foreign Affairs Committee and meeting with the Swedish International Development Agency that has been a consistent supporter of disability-specific development programmes in Africa for many years.

I also had an opportunity to have a close consultation with the Chairperson of the International Disability Alliance. Finally, shortly after my return from Sweden, I attended the Inclusion International Middle East and North Africa Regional Conference in Benghazi, Libya, where I met with the Minister for Social Affairs and the Prime Minister, as well as members from a number of organizations of persons with disabilities. My meeting with the Prime Minister of Libya was very fruitful in that he proposed that an Africa Summit of Disability and Development

be held in Tripoli during the meeting of the Heads of African States in July 2010. It is my intention to follow-up on the proposal when I visit Libya next month.

Mr. Chairman,

To give effect to my vision I intend to focus on the following priorities:

- Monitoring, promotion and implementation of the Standard Rules in line with the other disability instruments in the context of development and their usage in the development of national policies;
- Fostering International cooperation as envisaged in Article 32 of the CRPD, in the Standard Rules and other relevant instruments;
- Promoting the mainstreaming of disability in priorities of the global development agenda, poverty and hunger, focusing on the Millennium Development Goals
- Raising greater awareness and support for the Convention and its Optional Protocol and;
- Focusing special attention on measures to address vulnerabilities of specific groups of the disability community, such as women and girls with disabilities, children and persons with mental disabilities; persons with disabilities in situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies- such as we are now witnessing in Haiti;

The previous Special Rapporteurs Mr. Bengt Lindqvist and Sheikha Hissa Al-Thani noted in their reports to the Commission that there was a lack of implementation of disability policies in countries around the world. I would in my term focus on the blockages on the implementation to disability specific programmes and policies. One of the means of encouraging the implementation of disability programmes and policies is through the sharing of information and technical cooperation.

This sharing of information and technical cooperation could ideally take place through regional summits with a strong emphasis on capacity building. The proposed conference in Libya is one example where such information and technical cooperation could take place. Information technology could also be used,

where existing institutions, such as the African Decade of Persons with Disabilities provide the opportunities to share information and promote technical cooperation.

The overwhelming majority of persons with disabilities live in the least developed countries. This poses an enormous challenge and responsibility on the shoulders of all of us collectively to ensure that development spending benefits those most in need. We have to ensure the Millennium Development Goals become inclusive of persons with disabilities, especially women and children with disabilities. I intend to meet with the relevant UN agencies involved in the MDGs and with as many bilateral/multilateral donors as resources would permit, to move forward the inclusion of disability and full participation of persons with disabilities in the current MDG processes and beyond.

The terms of reference of the Special Rapporteur also calls for the raising of awareness of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol. I intend to raise this matter in my discussion with Governments, as well as the United Nations system and civil society organizations.

The distinguished first Special Rapporteur, Mr. Bengt Lindqvist from Sweden, in his third report, concluded that although significant progress was made in many areas, some specific areas needed further attention. He mentioned a number of important areas including that of women and children and persons with mental disabilities, especially those with psychiatric disabilities. It is my intention to use my term to specifically highlight the needs of these groups, and in the least developed countries.

The proposed conference in Libya on Disability and Development in Africa would provide us with an excellent opportunity to highlight the concerns of the vulnerable amongst persons with disabilities.

There is also the matter of persons with disabilities in situations of great risk and the devastating and tragic earthquake in Haiti brings to mind the situation of persons with disabilities within the present circumstances and their urgent need for food and shelter.

We also need to ensure that persons with disabilities be included in all aspects of reconstruction efforts. I would also like to meet with the bilateral donors that are engaged in the humanitarian efforts such as in Haiti as well as those that are advocating for inclusion of disability in their development cooperation agenda.

Mr. Chairman,

In my earlier meeting with the chairperson of the International Disability Alliance, we discussed the composition and role of the Panel of Experts for the UN Special Rapporteur on Disability that review, advise and provide suggestions on the promotion, implementation and monitoring of the Standard Rules.

We intend to continue this dialogue with a view to ensuring broad participation from developing countries on the Panel of Experts. Broad participation from civil society is critical and if the majority of persons with disabilities are from the south, we must ensure that their voices are heard.

Persons with disabilities should be both agents and beneficiaries in all aspects of development processes. Equality and empowerment of persons with disabilities is the key to any successful development outcomes.

I have mentioned my key priorities and I would endeavour to achieve the kind of results that would contribute to sustained change in the lives of persons with disabilities. Some of the expected results are:

- an increase in the number of countries, especially in the south, with implementable and resourced programmes and policies;
- a flow of information as well as technical cooperation; an increase in the disability specific development budgeting;
- an increase in the number of countries that have ratified the Convention; and
- a heightened awareness of the most vulnerable persons with disabilities.

Mr. Chairman,

The ongoing challenge of insufficient resources could delay progress and impede the intended outcome of my term.

But, I remain optimistic that adequate resources will be available to enable me to function to the best of my abilities.

I look forward to the challenges and opportunities that my term will bring and particularly look forward to working with you and all partners in the UN family and beyond - so that we can make a lasting contribution to the improvement in the living conditions and lives of persons with disabilities worldwide.

After this morning session, I will make myself available for any questions in Conference room D from 1:15- 2:30pm.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.