



JOINT STATEMENT BY UNESCO AND UNICEF

THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES – 3 DECEMBER 2011

“Together for a better world for all including persons with disabilities in development”

Islamabad, 3 December 2011 – On the occasion of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) urge communities in Pakistan to show solidarity and support towards the integration of persons with disabilities in every aspect of their political, social, economic and cultural lives.

The United Nations observed the International Year of Disabled Persons in 1981. Since then, there has been significant progress in raising awareness about the rights of persons with disabilities and in strengthening the international normative framework to realize those rights – from the World Programme of Action (1982) to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – CRPD (2006). Already 153 countries in the world have signed the CRPD while 107 countries have ratified the Convention; Pakistan ratified the CRPD on 5 July 2011.

The most fundamental principle of the Convention is to change society itself, making it more inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based.

Prior to the introduction of the CRPD, UNESCO, based on its mandate of diversity and social inclusion, had already supported and institutionalized this fundamental principle of inclusiveness and inclusive education, fully reflected in the “UNESCO Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action for Special Needs Education”, with emphasis on an inclusive educational setting.

Today, UNESCO and UNICEF are jointly promoting inclusiveness and diversity by drawing special attention to the issue of most marginalized groups, especially children and women with disabilities, who may be affected by multiple discriminations caused by disability, gender, and poverty.

In particular, children with disabilities are routinely denied access to health, education and social services. They are often excluded from opportunities to participate in their communities, and are more vulnerable to violence and abuse. Discrimination against children with disabilities stems from multiple sources, including ignorance, prejudice and cultural norms, which in turn lead to stigma and entrenched social exclusion. Their participation is further limited by multiple barriers, including lack of access to the physical environment and to information and communication; lack of adequate legislation, lack of public policies and monitoring mechanisms; and lack of training for teachers and other service providers.

UNICEF and UNESCO are committed to working with our partners to overcome the barriers that stand between people with disabilities – especially children and women – and the full realization of their rights.

To achieve our common goal, we must involve the parents and communities where people with disabilities live, through the “Community-Based Rehabilitation” (CBR) approach, which is jointly supported by WHO, UNESCO and ILO. In addition, UNESCO has developed an educational kit, “Embracing Diversity: Toolkit for Creating Inclusive Learning – Friendly Environment”, while UNICEF supports “Child Friendly Schools” to achieve the goal of inclusiveness in education involving marginalized students, including children with disabilities.

Today, UNESCO and UNICEF also wish to highlight the need for a shift in policies and programmes so that all environments – political, social, economic and cultural – become more conducive to persons with disabilities having fully functional lives.

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