



**PANEL:
Social Integration of Persons with Disability in
the Middle East**



ARAB DECADE OF DISABILITY: ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERSPECTIVES

November 23, 2013

The theme of the panel discussion was "The Arab Decade of Disabled: achievements and prospects". The presentations have focused on the achievements and new perspectives opened by the end of the Arab Decade for Persons with Disabilities (2004-2013).

The Panel has been chaired by the Assistant Director of the European Disability Forum (EDF), Javier Guemes. The EDF is a Brussels-based organization that brings together national organizations from 30 countries in Europe and chairs the International Disability Alliance. The International Disability Alliance is an organization that represents and defends the rights of persons with disabilities worldwide.

The participants were: Alberto Bocanegra, representative of the Foundation for the Social Promotion of Culture (FPSC) and Head of Mission of the FPSC in Beirut; Georges Xanthopoulos Job Mobility Manager of the Lebanese organization Arcenciel; Annie Mezagopian Executive Director of the Jordanian organization Al Hussein Society; Magritte Saroufim Director of Local Development of the Egyptian organization Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services and Zeinab Khaula, President of Yadan bi Yad.



**PANEL:
Social Integration of Persons with Disability in
the Middle East**



ALBERTO BOCANEGRA VIDAL
Head of Mission. FPSC Beirut.

Post-2015 Development Agenda and Disability

As a result of the discussions that at national level are being conducted to shape the post-2015 Agenda it is worth mentioning:

A. The holding of the Conference on High Segment of the UN General Assembly on disability and development held in New York on September 23, in which 50 Member States, Agencies and civil society made statements. It is the first time in UN history that the rights of PWD have been discussed in the context of the political agenda of the United Nations.

During the meeting the recommendations of the World Report on Disability 2011 (WRD) published by the World Health Organization and the World Bank were presented. The WRD is the first document that gives an overall picture of the situation of PWD, their needs and the barriers they face to participate fully in their societies. The goal of WRD is to support the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006.

As Chairman of the International Disability Alliance (IDA) President Yannis Vardakastanis spoke on behalf of the PWD at the opening of the meeting and called on decision-makers to include the rights of PWD in the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

B. Key Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations of the IMD:

1. Incorporate disability in general to the development agenda post-2015, including measurable objectives, clear targets and indicators.

Although 80% of the one billion people living with disabilities in the world live in developing countries, it is estimated that only 3-4% benefit from development efforts. Therefore, the omission of the disability perspective and PWD in developing targets and indicators have prevented them from benefiting from the progress that the MDGs have reported to others. We must focus on a social model that regards disability as one of the main barriers to tackle global poverty as an MDG target and any future internationally agreed development goal

2. Incorporate universal accessibility and inclusive design as an integral part of sustainable and inclusive development:

Environmental accessibility is recognized as fundamental to the participation of all in society and development. Direct relationship between transportation available,



PANEL:
**Social Integration of Persons with Disability in
the Middle East**



universal access to basic public services and sustainable development is noted. The universal and equitable access is a key element of sustainable development, but in sectors such as health, employment and education can not occur if the transport is inaccessible.

It was highlighted that accessibility is achieved increasingly through universal design, the use of assistive technologies and the availability of affordable housing, among others. With increasing urbanization, however, accessibility standards are not met in most infrastructure development projects in a number of areas worldwide

3. Enter disability in the post-2015 framework regarding disaster risk reduction.

It was noted that people with disabilities have a higher risk of death, injury and secondary disabilities as a result of the exclusion of policies to reduce disaster risks, plans and programs. The central role of innovative technologies to collect and disseminate timely information and also to provide accessible services such as medical care during emergencies for individuals with disabilities was also recognized.

4. Strengthen international cooperation and partnerships between multiple actors:

It was emphasized the need to strengthen cooperation and partnerships to work on programs and policies related to the PWD. Successful cooperation and partnership should include a budget that allows implementation.

C. The launch of a new initiative of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA): The DESA Forum on Disability and Development, global focal point on disability within the UN system. In line with the vision of the United Nations to promote inclusive and sustainable development for all, the objective of the creation of the Forum is to contribute to the collective effort of the international community to advance inclusive development from the perspective of disability, especially in the current context of the emerging post-2015 framework for development.



PANEL:
**Social Integration of Persons with Disability in
the Middle East**



GEORGES XANTHOPOULOS

Director of Mobility and Employment. Arcenciel.

La Discapacidad en Líbano

As the Arab Decade has not brought along new measures, Lebanon has continued to monitor the implementation of the rights under Lebanese law. Currently there is legislation on the following aspects:

- Specifications for all new buildings to which there is public access that cover all disabilities,
- Sign language is officially recognized only in some courts, translators are available only on request, and paid by the State
- The main telephone lines of emergency in the country (police, fire, ambulance) are only accessible to people with certain disabilities, no services voice, text or video is provided.
- Education should be inclusive and of quality. In Lebanon the private schools are beginning to be inclusive, but are very expensive. In addition, only children with certain disabilities have access to regular education, the rest should attend special schools.
- - It is required from companies with more than 30 employees to hire at least 3% of PWD in its total workforce. However, the economic crisis and unemployment makes difficult to apply.
- There are some webs service agencies in the public sector (schools, employment services, etc.), yet none of them is accessible to all types of disability.

The Convenio for the "Improvement of integration of Persons with Disabilities in the Middle East" (www.accessibilityforpwd.org) funded by the Spanish Cooperation is the first in the region that has promoted these specifications. The collaboration with the Spanish Technosite company belonging to the ONCE group in the field of digital technology to PWD should be noted.

Since Lebanon has not signed yet the International Convention on the Rights of the Disabled 2006, the private sector and NGO are the promoters of the PWD agenda in the country.



PANEL:
**Social Integration of Persons with Disability in
the Middle East**



ANNIE MEDZAGOPHIAN

Executive Director. Al Hussein Society.

Disability in Jordan

Jordan's health services cover 80% of the population and ranks No. 19 according to UNESCO in health care to the population. There is no reliable statistics on population with Disability as in the whole middle east region. Jordan has joined the Washington Group on Disability Statistics to incorporate statistical methods in order to make a realistic census¹.

Jordan was the first Arab country to sign the Convention on the Rights of the Disabled. It has a law on disability since 2007. The law creates a National Council on Disability that has drafted a National Strategy on Disability (2007-2015). Recently tax breaks for PWD have been approved. 249 NGOs and 20 DPO provide services for the disabled.

There has been obvious achievements in the field of Disability in the last decade. Nevertheless, the economic crisis and a backward mentality in relation to PWD explain that the vast majority of these people remain invisible to society.



PANEL:
**Social Integration of Persons with Disability in
the Middle East**



MARGRIT SAROUFIM

Local Development Director. Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services

Disability in Egypt

According to the WHO, ILO and UNICEF, Egyptian disabled population ranges between 7 and 10%, representing 10 million people. The services available for the disabled and their families cover only 1.9% of the needs. There is good legislation that is not met in new buildings, the mandatory use of 5% of PWD. However, no national law on disability has been approved so far.

In the last decade there has been significant developments in policies related to disability in Egypt:

- The National Strategic Plan for Pre-University Education Reform contained in Chapter 12, "Supporting the education program and the integration of children with disabilities."
- The execution of two national projects on disability issues in partnership between government and NGOs are: Social Protection Initiatives Draft (Ministry of Social Affairs), funded by the World Bank, the project Children at risk (Children's and Maternity National Council) funded by the European Union.
- The creation of the National Council on Disability in 2008 by Ministerial Decree 2012 to integrate children with disabilities in public and regular schools.
- Signature and ratification of the International Convention on the Rights of the Disabled.
- The National Council for Childhood and Motherhood drafted a bill on disability in Egypt in 2010.
- The development of two bills on Disability by the National Disability Council and the Ministry of Social Affairs in 2012.
- The approval of article 72 of the Egyptian Constitution of 2012 recognizes the right of the PWD.
- The appointment of representatives from the Disability Commission for the Constitutional reform scheduled for 2013.



PANEL:
**Social Integration of Persons with Disability in
the Middle East**



ZEINAB KHAULA

President. Yadan bi Yad.

Disability in Syria before and after the crisis

Syrian Disability legislation has guaranteed the rights of PWD in the areas of health (free medical care throughout the public health system), education (compulsory education in integrated schools for children with special needs) and labor market (interest-free loans, 4% in the public sector procurement, tax incentives in the private sector). In the field of environmental accessibility standards and technical conditions exist for public infrastructure and civil works. Tax exemptions for imports of technical aids for PWD and for other cultural institutions tickets, transport, etc. are also contemplated. Monthly benefits to children with cerebral palsy are granted.

NGO are the main drivers of the rights of PWD promoting their participation in all spheres of society. NGO have helped to raise awareness through seminars, conferences and workshops. The current drama has certainly helped raise awareness.

In conclusion, during the current crisis some NGOs in the disability sector have ceased their activities for fear of being accused of supporting the government or the opposition. The atrocities of war are dramatically increasing the number of disabled and aggravating the conditions of others. Health conditions have seriously deteriorated due to lack of public services, emigration of professionals and drug shortages. However, other NGOs continue to work with the Syrian government in drafting a new law about disability to amend the previous one and to conform to the international standards. It is expected that NGO sector in the drafting of the law represents 50%.



PANEL:
**Social Integration of Persons with Disability in
the Middle East**



JAVIER GÜEMES

Deputy Director. European Disability Forum.

Conclusiones

Once finished speaking the moderator highlighted the following aspects:

- The case of Lebanon which has not signed the International Convention on the Rights of PWD so far. Nevertheless, a strong civil society protects PWD with significant achievements.
- The case of Jordan where the participation of PWD in public life has led them to demonstrate in the streets in defense of their rights.
- The measurement criteria of "Washington Group on Disability Statistics" are not entirely reliable.
- The case of Egypt where there has been negative experiences regarding DPO's registration for political reasons. On the other hand, progress has been made in the text of the 2012 Constitution by including the rights of PWD.
- The case of Syria where due to the present circumstances no Syrian organizations can hardly work in the country. Hopefully, once the situation goes back to normal NGO would be able to help the disabled population. EDF intends to do so.

During the debate the moderator proposed an exchange of views on the challenges and future prospects in the field of disability in the region with the following conclusions:

- There is a poor implementation of existing legislation due to lack of resources in this time of crisis with the subsequent decline in the rights of PWD in the region.
- There has been no agreement on surveillance and monitoring mechanisms of the processes among participants. The moderator outlined the convenience of independent advices that not bend to the demands of governments.
- At the suggestion of a 2nd Arab Decade that this time will influence National Disability Agendas there was a total agreement. A common framework in which each country could perform according to their specificities would be best suited.
- The real engine of change in the region has been the International Convention for Disabled Persons driven by NGOs and DPO.

Finally, the moderator has reported on the Musawa2 Project which the EDF has developed in the last two years with funding from the AECID. This project has institutionally



PANEL:
**Social Integration of Persons with Disability in
the Middle East**



strengthened the association network in the field of Disability by holding meetings and conferences of Mediterranean organizations over the past two years. It has also highlighted the synergies between Musawa2 Project and the Convenio for the “Improvement of the Social Integration of Disabled Persons in the Middle East through accessibility. Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Egypt” funded by the AECID and implemented by the FPSC and its local partners.

ⁱ http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/washington_group/wg_background.htm