

## Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser inaugurates the Doha International Conference on Disability and Development

- The overarching theme of the inaugural DICDD is “Leaving No One Behind”
- The Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations was among the 1,500 attendees on the opening day
- DICDD serves as a platform to address the issues and challenges faced by more than 1.5 billion people with disabilities worldwide
- Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser: there are 1.5 billion people with disabilities around the world, more than the total population of North America, Europe, Australia, and Japan combined
- HE Ms. Amina Mohammed: It’s up to us to change the situation of persons with disabilities

**December 07, 2019 – Doha, Qatar:** Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, a global advocate for the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and Founder of Qatar Foundation for Social Work (QFSW) attended today's opening ceremony of the inaugural Doha International Disability and Development Conference (DICDD).

The conference, which is being held under the theme of “Leaving No-One Behind”, has been organized by QFSW in collaboration with local and international partners and will conclude on December 08, at Qatar National Convention Centre.

The Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, Her Excellency Amina Mohammed, and the Advisor to the Presidential Government of the Republic of Ecuador, Xavier Torres, also attended the opening ceremony.

On the opening day, more than 1,500 experts, specialists and policy makers from Qatar and around the world took part in the conference.

**Addressing the opening ceremony, HH Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, the Founder of QFSW, said:**

“First, allow me to wonder: what is disability? What is the difference between a person who has a disability and one who does not? Who describes and defines this concept?”

Recent studies have shown what I also believe: that every human has some form of disability, albeit of different kinds and at different stages. But there should be no difference between one person and another, based on their level of disability.

Indeed, I believe that disability is a stereotype perpetuated by a prevailing mentality and social culture that define persons with disabilities based on misconceptions. There are two perspectives on disability: one comes from a medical standpoint, and one from a social standpoint. The typical treatment of people with disabilities follows the medical approach, which focuses on physical and visible attributes.

The very concept of disability is limited to traditional disabilities and excludes other disabilities, and so when we rallied for the cause of disability in the past, we overlooked many people who

are exposed to harsh conditions and, thus, suffer psychological damage, whether because of factors related to family, society, or the effects of war and conflict.

If our concept of disability is based on visible disability, and ignores hidden disability, then doesn't the illiterate suffer from an educational disability? Is ignorance not an intellectual disability? Isn't there also such a concept as political disability? And isn't the violation and assault against others a moral disability?

I also believe distinguishing people apart based on the definition of disability implicates a form of discrimination. Sometimes, I even feel that the exceptions we make for people with disabilities, with the intention of showing sympathy toward them, do more harm than good.

During my preparation to participate in Disability Week, I wanted to be able to identify with those involved in this event. I read *The Days* by Taha Hussein, known as the blind dean of Arabic literature. He mentioned how, according to his personal experience, a child with disability is trapped between the sympathy of their family and the negativity – even mockery – that they experience outside the home. These two behaviors bring about another disability to a child because they prevent them from naturally growing and organically integrating into society. Unfortunately, and evidently, a major change has not occurred in dealing with the issue of disability. Children with disabilities still suffer from what Taha Hussein was talking about seven decades ago, as if time has stopped.

In order to restore time's passage and address the discrimination resulting from the current and past concept of disability, we have a great deal of work ahead of us to correct the consequences of these misconceptions and the perceptions that followed as a result.

To understand just how much work is required, there are 1.5 billion people with disabilities around the world, more than the total population of North America, Europe, Australia, and Japan combined. And these numbers make us realize the unacceptable level of negligence that has been shown toward these people, who we chose to describe as disabled and chose to be distinguished apart from them.

When we look at the developing countries, they contain more than 80 percent of the total number of people with disabilities in the world. This makes it blatantly clear: that disability levels are an indicator of a nation's development, wherein development and stability declines, the percentage of people with disabilities increases. In the Arab world, it is estimated that there are 40 million people with disabilities, more than half of them are children and teenagers, due to effects of wars and conflicts, as we have seen in Iraq since 1980 and Syria, Libya, and Yemen since 2011.

Despite Qatar's leadership in being one of the most supportive countries for people with disabilities, we are looking to see more support in promoting education and employment opportunities. We are now more optimistic after what we have seen the country's decision-makers pledge, and, from our side, we share this commitment.

We must collaborate globally to devise mechanisms to stop the waste in resources caused by the lack of investment and empowerment for people with disabilities and enable them to play active roles in the development of society. We can achieve this through meaningful employment of this large number that has been marginalized for the sake of disability, especially those talented among them.

I was astounded by Taha Hussein's remarkable ability to describe his surroundings in detail, as if he had more than two eyes. It made me realize that disability is not in lack of sight, but in lack of insight. In his own words, may he rest in peace: "We have not been created without any purpose. We have not been tasked with simply satisfying people. We have been given a duty, and it is a duty we must perform. If we do not fulfil this duty, we must accept the responsibilities and the consequences.

The time has come for everyone to perform their duty. The time has come to put an end to this kind of blind discrimination. Rest assured, nothing about you will be done without you."

**Her Excellency Ms. Amina J. Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, said:**

"It is my great pleasure to join this historic international conference on disability and development. Allow me to begin by thanking the State of Qatar for its leadership on this crucial change.

"I would like to highlight the tireless efforts of Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser herself. She is one of the most dedicated advocates we have for improving education around the globe and ensuring no one is left behind, especially persons with disabilities.

In all regions, stigma faced by persons with disabilities abounds, compounded by a lack of understanding of their rights, and of the value of their contributions to society. This situation is untenable. It goes against collective commitment to human dignity, our obligations under international law and the strong business case for disability inclusion.

It is up to us – leaders from the government, business, civil society, organizations of persons with disabilities, international organizations and others – to turn this situation around.

Firstly, some countries still need to work harder to increase the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data, disaggregated by disability, to inform their approaches to disability inclusion. Secondly, resources are critical. Governments should be making disability inclusion a priority within their national budgets. Thirdly, we must improve accessibility. Accessibility is a precondition for the full inclusion and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in our society. Finally, we need to support persons with disabilities in conflict and humanitarian settings.

One of the single most effective ways to change mindsets is to have more and more persons with disabilities in our offices and in our midst. We must be the change we want to see. I urge all actors – particularly States Parties to the Convention and their international partners – to be more ambitious in implementing their commitments to disability-inclusive development".

**Commenting at the opening ceremony, Ms. Amal bin Abdullatif Al-Mannai, CEO of QFSW, said:**

“Qatar has long advocated for the rights of people with disabilities around the world. In 2006 for example, Qatar supported the UN’s Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, before signing it in 2008. Qatar has also invested heavily in the knowledge and resources to monitor and evaluate progress towards the SDGs for persons with disabilities. Working closely with the United Nations, we have also adopted the objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to support persons with disabilities in Qatar and globally.”

Ms. Amal bin Abdullatif Al-Mannai, added, “The conference is the first of its kind to address, on a single platform, the sustainable development of society and human rights in the context of disability. Through a range of policy recommendations and discussions on the implementation of the SDGs, the conference will have a positive impact in transforming the lives and maximizing the benefits of people with disabilities.”

“The conference will also enhance the call to action for international cooperation and provide educational services, health and job opportunities,” Ms. Amal bin Abdullatif Al-Mannai concluded.

### **Day 1 sessions**

Following the remarks at the opening ceremony, a total of seven sessions took place focusing on seeking high-level political commitments from global leaders towards persons with disabilities and opening-up the lines connecting the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the UN SDGs.

The sessions discussed inclusive equality, education and employment. As well as, topics on health, well-being, sexual and reproductive health care, smarter policy and data and research in the context of disability.

DICDD featured several guest speakers from Qatar and abroad who shared their personal stories of living with disabilities. The guest speakers were: Kholoud Abu Sharida, Muniba Mezari and Eddie Ndopu.

In line with the the DICDD theme of "Leaving No-One Behind," the Masters of Ceremony were all persons with disabilities. They were: Faisal Al-Kohaji, and Mohammed Al-Faheda.

### **Exhibition showcases local disability initiatives**

Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser officially inaugurated the accompanying exhibition, which showcased local initiatives, projects, and assistive-technologies that are today empowering people with disabilities.

Partners of the exhibition are: Qatar Airways, Mada – Assistive Technology Center Qatar, Exxon Mobil, Shafallah Center, Al Noor Institute for the Blind, Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, the Cultural Village Foundation-Katara, Qatar Science and Technology Park, Qatar National Tourism Council, and Ministry of Municipality and Environment.

### **Doha Declaration**

Disability advocates and dignitaries eagerly await the key outcome of the conference, the announcement of the Doha Declaration. The declaration will become a key international

reference point for policy development and the advancement of human rights and sustainable social development in the context of disability for people with disabilities.

### **Qatar's unceasing efforts and its progress in the disability field**

The Second National Development Strategy (2018-2022) has seen significant improvements in the integration of persons with disabilities compared to the first National Development Strategy (2011-2016). Qatar places great importance on the rights of people with disabilities. A social rather than a medical model for disability is gradually evolving to meet the QNV 2030 aspirations for social justice and inclusion.

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### **About DICDD**

The Doha International Conference on Disability and Development will be held on 7–8 of December 2019, under the guidance and patronage of Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, a global advocate for the SDGs, and Founder of Qatar Foundation for Social Work and its affiliated civil society centers.

The key visionary item on the agenda of the conference is about how to rationalize, consolidate, contextualize, and streamline the nexus between the UN SDGs and the UN CRPDs based on the co-production of social policy between civil society and governments to achieve meaningful structural change to achieve inclusive equality. By and large, this endeavor is more than likely to ignite a visionary 21st century approach that will positively impact on all world-wide 1.5 billion persons with disabilities.

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