

Panel Discussion on

**“Making the MDGs Inclusive:
Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities and their Communities
Around the World”**

*On the occasion of the International Day for Persons with Disabilities,
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I am pleased to be part of this panel on “Making the MDGs inclusive of persons with disabilities”.

The Philippine perspective on disability policy

The Philippines passed a law on persons with disabilities in 1992 that made their integration into the mainstream of society as a national policy. What is particularly noteworthy in this law is how it translates, in a clear and simple way, a rights-based approach on disability into the practical aspects of development. Frankly, our law can be more comprehensive in coverage. Right now, it has only three primary focus areas -- education, employment and vocational rehabilitation (and we know that development includes much more than that) -- but that is why there are current efforts in the Philippines to review the law and augment it through additional legislation to strengthen the disability policy framework in the country. I'd like to tell you that, in this work, our obligations as State Party to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities really influence the shaping of our domestic legislation, strengthening the human rights perspective in our policy framework.

But even while our law's scope can be better improved, its advantage is that it is strongly anchored on the principle that improving the living standards of

persons with disabilities, by equalizing the opportunities for them with the rest of the population, would be key in enabling them to participate in nation-building.

Some of you may ask “Why does the Philippines have a particular interest on a development approach on disability policy”?

For a developing country like the Philippines, there are just so many compelling reasons in favor of a strong development approach. Most starkly, the majority of persons with disabilities in my country are among the poorest of our population. They often live in areas where basic social services are scarce. When we look at persons with disabilities who are women, children, the elderly, or are members of indigenous communities, the development issues are magnified when concerns of the disability sector intersect with other issues relating to land reform, economic empowerment, political participation, the environment, etc. Those are enough to compel us to strongly see disability from a development angle.

We are also cognizant that persons with disabilities make up roughly ten percent of the population. That’s quite a significant ratio. If the Filipinos with disabilities are enabled to live in an environment that protects their human rights and one that is conducive to developing their skills and potentials, then the Philippines would be benefiting from the large productivity gains and economic returns of an empowered ten percent of the population.

Lessons from the Decade of Disabled Persons

Inclusive development has been an overarching theme of many international advocacy and standard setting efforts. We remember, of course, the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons in 1982, which provided the seeds for disability mainstreaming as a core strategy. Our experience during the International Decade of Disabled Persons showed us that it is not easy to convince policymakers and implementers to be conscious of using a disability lens as a development strategy. Even in progressive countries, a disability perspective is often not automatically used when implementing and assessing development policy. Obviously, without a strong will to mainstream and include disability issues, the resources will be hard to get. That brings me to another major observation from the Decade, and it’s that

mainstreaming initiatives and efforts are sorely underfunded, that is, if they even appear in budgets and financial plans in the first place.

In the course of the Decade, we have constantly seen that, while disability perspective and policy have progressed, there is a persistent disconnect between promise and results. Moreover, we are also seeing that the results of disability mainstreaming can vary widely depending on how and where the implementation is done.

The growth of the disability and development perspective

Four years ago, in 2005, while the Convention was still being developed, the Philippines took an active role in putting out the message that the work towards the MDGs will be in danger of not reaching persons with disabilities unless there is a conscious and deliberate effort to include them. This advocacy led us to work on a General Assembly resolution, resolution 60/131, which provided a bridge between the 1982 World Programme of Action and the 2000 Millennium Development Goals. That paved a clear road ahead for the mainstreaming of disability in current development efforts.

In the following couple of years, in 2007, the General Assembly was to pass a resolution on disability and the MDGs, and this resolution, 62/127, went a step further in its advocacy, by calling on all Governments to include the situation of persons with disabilities in MDG reports.

So since 2007, the traditionally biennial resolution on disability and development has become a yearly resolution. This is an indication of the growing urgency and attention by the United Nations to ensure a disability lens to the MDGs, especially as we get closer to the 2015 target.

2010: A Year of Opportunities

Just a few weeks ago, the Third Committee of the General Assembly passed another resolution on disability. This resolution focuses on the High Level MDG Review, to be held next year, as an opportunity, five years before the 2015 target, to remind Governments and all development actors that MDG efforts should benefit persons with disabilities. The year 2010 is also going

to be a year where many countries will conduct a new round of their national census and surveys. This again presents a golden opportunity to address the invisibility of persons with disabilities and their concerns in official statistics.

Speaking of statistics, we know that a basic problem underlying the inadequacy of development policies in the context of disability is that policymakers in many countries simply do not have the information about who and where these persons with disabilities are, what issues and concerns they have that hinder their development, and what potentials they can offer to contribute to national progress. We need to ensure that our censuses next year take this into account, if we are to be serious about realizing the MDGs for persons with disabilities.

So at next year's MDG review, we will need to count on you to keep track of how disability-sensitive the reports and discussions will be. We will need to keep on to the message that the MDG efforts should impact positively on persons with disabilities, both as agents of the development work and beneficiaries of the outcomes.

Thank you.