

Panel on Making the MDGs Inclusive: "Empowerment of persons with disabilities and their communities around the world."

Introduction:

Ms. Akiko Ito, our distinguished panelists, representatives from governments, civil society, friends, ladies and gentlemen: good morning. First, on behalf of Rehabilitation International and the International Disability Alliance, I thank UN-DESA for the opportunity to facilitate this panel today. It's my distinct honor and privilege to have been given the chance to do this task.

For those of us who have worked in the field of disability for decades, we are very pleased of having witnessed the shift in paradigms in terms of people's acknowledgment that disability rights are human rights coupled by the increasing recognition of the fact that it is almost wistful thinking to assume that the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) will be realized without addressing the poverty of hundreds of millions of persons with disabilities particularly those living in the developing countries.

Needless to say that the links between poverty and disability are so strong that unless concrete and specific steps are taken to address the issue, poverty will continue to persist and the MDGs will just be goals that will be far from being realized.

Our panel this morning will address issues relative to the theme of this year's celebration of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities which emphasizes on the significant role we play as agents and beneficiaries of development in all aspects of the social, political, economic and cultural life of our communities.

The members of our panel will bring to our discussion, perspectives gained from their years of work in their respective fields of endeavor. While I would have loved to provide you with more details of their achievements including highlights of their careers, in the interest of time, I would have to shorten my introduction.

Profiles of the speakers in the same order that they will be making their presentations.

- (1) Ms. Joyce Kafanabo, the Minister Plenipotentiary of the Permanent Mission of Tanzania to the United Nations. She has assumed her current post in 2004. She is responsible for all social, cultural and humanitarian issues in her mission, which includes work in the Third Committee of the General Assembly, the Commission on the Status of Women, the Commission for Social Development, Humanitarian, Women and Children's thematic debates in the Security Council. She has worked extensively in promoting equality issues between men and women in Tanzania, including working in the President's Office from 1997-2004. An accountant by profession, Ms. Kafanabo was a lecturer in accountancy, management accounting, financial management and auditing. She has a Masters Degree in Finance from the Strathclyde University in Glasgow, Scotland.
- (2) Ms. Marie Yvette Banzon-Abalos is the current expert of the Philippine Mission to the UN for the Third Committee of the General Assembly, handling social policy and human rights issues for the delegation of the Philippines. Since 2003, she has been the facilitator of the General Assembly resolution on disability and the World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons and disability and the MDGs, leading the negotiations towards international consensus. In 2005, through the efforts of the Philippine delegation, the General Assembly has been encouraged with the commitment to make the MDGs inclusive of persons with disabilities. Ms. Banson-Abalos, an ardent supporter of disability-inclusive development, has also worked in the bureau of the Ad Hoc Committee of the General Assembly tasked with developing the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- (3) Mr. Werner Obermeyer is the deputy to the Executive Director of the World Health organization at the UN Headquarters in New York. Among other tasks, he is responsible of WHO's relations with the UN system entities based in New York, as

- (4) well as non-governmental organizations that focus on public health issues. He is a political scientist by training and has extensive multilateral experience in negotiations relating to environmental sustainability and governance, dealing with diverse issues from health and the environment, to climate change.
- (5) Ms. Aleksandra Posarac is the disability and development team leader of the World Bank. She is a lead development economist in the Social Protection Division of the Bank's Human Development Network. She joined the World Bank in 1998 after a distinguished career as a senior research associate at the Belgrade Institute of Economic Sciences where she led research on public finance, poverty and human development. In the Bank, she has led both operational and analytical work in human development and poverty and has led the Bank's technical advisers on social safety net, pension system and policy development in a wide range of countries.
- (6) Ms. Maarit Kohonen, coordinator of the Rights and Economic and Social Issues Unit of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. She has been the chief of the Human Rights, Economic and Social Issues Section in the Research and Right to Development Division of OHCHR since May 2008. Prior to that, she served as representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Uganda from 2005-2008. She has worked with the UN Center for Human Rights and the OHCHR for eighteen years, specializing in peace and security issues, and women's rights.
- (7) Mr. James Forbes, member of the Board of Directors of the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP). Mr. Forbes is a financial executive services partner of Tatum LLC. He previously served as executive vice president and chief financial officer of Lighthouse International, executive vice chairman and chief financial officer of AmeriCares, accounting and operations Controller of Mercedes-Benz and auditor of Price Waterhouse. Mr. Forbes earned his Bachelor's in Business Administration from Manhattan College and is a Certified Public Accountant in the State of New York.

Summary of presentations of the panelists:

- The panelists have addressed (1) the central role of the community based approach and (2) of the human rights-based approach to the empowerment of persons with disabilities and to achieving the MDGs for all.
- They stressed on the fact that there are particular circumstances – such as poverty and old age – that may be associated with disability, and of the importance of taking these into consideration in development.
- Mr. Obermeyer discussed community-based rehabilitation (CBR), as a development strategy to provide rehabilitation services, reduce poverty, equalize opportunities and promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in their communities using a multi-sectoral approach. He presented concrete ways by which CBR can contribute to bringing the CRPD to communities and how this as a strategy, can be used to achieving the MDGs for persons with disabilities.
- Ms. Kohonen has noted the importance of incorporating human rights and the principle of equality and non-discrimination in the Millennium Development Goals in order to ensure that persons with Disabilities are included and the MDGs are achieved for all. She underscored the benefits of ensuring such a human rights approach to the MDGs as an important vehicle for the empowerment of persons with disabilities.
- Ms. Posarac has addressed MDGs and disability-inclusive development based from the World Bank's perspective on this issue. She has underscored that including persons with disabilities in services is a big issue that goes beyond MDGs. She cited the key role played by education in building a better future and its importance in the overall effort to build human capital.
- Mr. Forbes has provided us an overview of aging and disability in the United States. He shared his thoughts on what he calls a "livable community" – one that has affordable and appropriate housing, supportive community features and services, and

- adequate mobility options, which together, facilitate personal independence and the engagement of the residents in civic and social life as a way to meet practical day-to-day needs of increasing numbers of older persons and persons with disabilities, enabling them to be full participants in their communities.
- Ms. Yvette Abalos has shared the perspectives of the Philippines in disability and mainstreaming disability in national laws. She stated that while the Philippines has a disability anti-discrimination law, there is much to be desired in terms of implementation in the context of current development efforts. Ms. Banzon-Abalos also mentioned that international level developments help shape the current disability initiatives in the country. She expressed concern though, that disability mainstreaming in the context of the Philippines is not backed up by resources which is a challenge. She made an appeal to the Government to include disability in the country's reporting on the MDGs.
- Ms. Kafanabo cited the high prevalence of disability in Kenya and the need for more visibility of persons with disabilities as a prerequisite for their inclusion in the lives and activities of their communities. She noted that poverty among persons with disabilities in her country is high while their inclusion in development initiatives is low. But she said that the Government of Kenya has made the commitment to support strategies for inclusion of persons with disabilities in development in light of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

In conclusion, the chair has highlighted three things:

- A. That the gap between policy and practice persists. To narrow this gap and realize the goal of MDGs for all, development strategies, policies and programmes have to be accessible and inclusive of issues concerning persons with disabilities, and must promote the equalization of opportunities.

To this end it is necessary to:

- Ensure the participation of persons with disabilities at all levels as agents and beneficiaries of development.
- We must also increase awareness among all stakeholders about the rights and issues concerning persons with disabilities.

B. The 2010 review of progress and barriers/obstacles encountered in the implementation of the MDGs is an important opportunity to enhance efforts to realize the MDGs for persons with disabilities.

In this regard, it is important to include the disability perspective and persons with disabilities in reviewing progress to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, by among others,

- Evaluating the impact of the measures for the MDGs on persons with disabilities, and
- Assessing the extent to which persons with disabilities benefit from efforts towards the goals.

C. The lack of data on disability and the situation of persons with disabilities continues to be a major obstacle to their inclusion in development.

- There is an extreme need to collect data and information about the situation of persons with disabilities

- and it is important to use statistics to ensure that a disability perspective is included in reviewing progress towards realizing the Millennium Development Goals.#