

Regional Director's Message on International Day of Persons with Disabilities

Achieving 17 Goals for the Future We Want



About 15% of the global population lives with some form of disability; of those, 2–4% experience significant difficulties in functioning. The disability prevalence rate in our Region is the second highest for moderate disability and third highest for severe disability. Global disability is on the rise due to population ageing and the rapid spread of chronic diseases and improvements in the methodologies used to measure disability. However, people with disabilities continue to live with great physical, social, economic and attitudinal barriers in their daily lives.

The theme of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities this year is “Achieving 17 Goals for the Future We Want”. This theme notes the recent adoption of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the role of these goals in building a more inclusive and equitable world for persons with disabilities.

Observance of International Day of Persons with Disabilities also coincides this year with the 10 years of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) – one of the most widely ratified international treaties put forth by the United Nations to date. This year's objectives also include assessing the current status of the CRPD and SDGs, and laying the foundation for the future of greater inclusion for persons with disabilities.

The main purpose of observing this day is to improve global understanding of people with disability issues as well as showing support for them to improve their self-esteem, well-being and rights in society. It also looks for their involvement in all facets of life including political, economic, social and cultural. Persons with disabilities should be empowered to be able to fulfil their role in society and participate equally with others. We need to focus on their ability and not on their disability. It is important to note that disability is part of the human condition, and that all of us either are or will become disabled to one degree or another during the course of our lives.

Not all disabilities are visible. Persons with mental and psychosocial disabilities, intellectual disabilities, as well as hearing impairments represent a significant proportion of the world's population but may not be recognized as disabled. Millions of people worldwide have mental health conditions, and an estimated one in four people globally will experience a mental health

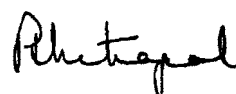
condition in their lifetime. World Disability Day is an opportunity to advocate for all people with disabilities, including those whose disability may not be visible.

Observing this day also provides us the opportunity to review how far we have come in recognizing persons with disabilities as another manifestation of diversity in our communities, and to stand in support of a society that embraces that diversity in all its forms.

To promote integration and equal rights of people with disabilities within and by the community, WHO organized the first Asia-Pacific Community-based Rehabilitation (CBR) Congress in Thailand in 2009 and the first World CBR Congress in India in 2012. One year later, in 2013, a consultation was organized titled '*WHO Global Disability Action Plan 2014–2021: Better health for all people with disabilities*'. This plan is in line with CRPD and the UN High-level Meeting on Disability and Development. In October 2015 in Bhutan, a regional meeting took place that focused on strengthening intersectoral mechanisms for disability prevention and rehabilitation. An expert group on disability has been formed and its first meeting was organized in July 2016 in Indonesia, which focused on developing a national assistive technology policy and programme to ensure that the universal access target is achieved. However, there is still much to be done.

On the occasion of International Day of Persons with Disabilities, we should acknowledge the achievements and contributions of persons with disabilities to our families, workplaces, schools and communities.

I urge all Member States and partners to reaffirm our commitment for the dignity, rights and well-being of persons with disabilities.



Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh
Regional Director