

**Report on the Seventh World Assembly of DPI
Our Rights, Our Convention, But for All
Seoul South Korea
September 5 – 8 2007**

Introduction

This conference as the title suggests was focused on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD.)

Representatives from APF were invited to participate in a Town Hall Meeting between National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and disabled people and their representative organisations (DPOs) at the Assembly plenary session on September 5th.

About DPI

Disabled Peoples' International is a disabled people's organisation (DPO,) a network of national organisations or assemblies of disabled people, established to promote the human rights of disabled people through full participation, equalization of opportunity and development. It was founded 25 years ago following the International Year of Disabled People, and celebrated this anniversary at the assembly.

Many countries in the APF region have national DPIs or affiliated organisations.

The Town Hall Meeting

The Town Hall meeting had two formal goals. The first was to present to the participants the perspectives, concerns, and information needs of NHRIs relating to the UN CRPD, especially in regard to Article 33 and its mandate for domestic level implementation. Each panellist gave a short formal presentation.

The second goal was for the DPOs to have an opportunity to raise their own perspectives, concerns, and information needs about the Convention, including ways in which to access their respective governments, by question and answer.

The session was an attempt to initiate dialogue between NHRIs and DPOs, both to enhance DPO capacity and to better inform the efforts of NHRIs.

The panel was chaired by Professor Michael Stein from the Harvard University Law School and the Harvard Project on Disability. Panellists were; Mr Simon Walker from the UN OHCHR, myself, Mrs Aruna Sharma from the Indian Human Rights Commission, Ms Chung from the South Korean Human Rights Commission and Ms Charlotte McClain-Nhlapo, former Human Rights Commissioner from South Africa.

Professor Stein introduced Article 33 and the interactive nature of the meeting. Then Mr Walker gave an overview of NHRIs, what roles they play, and their complexity and varying models. The NHRI representatives each

spoke about some issues specific to our respective countries and institutions. (My presentation is attached.) Ms McClain-Nhlapo, as a former NHRI representative and a disability rights advocate, gave some personal observations and emphasised the necessity for DPOs to work with NHRIs to complete the formal presentation.

The Question and answer part of the Meeting was successful, with a number of thoughtful and perceptive questions asked, which gave the panellists an excellent opportunity to provide more detailed information. The opportunity for dialogue was well attended and well received by Assembly participants who clearly appreciated the opportunity to learn more about NHRIs, and we received positive feedback from many disabled people.

The Context for future action

This kind of dialogue is critical to ensure the Convention can be implemented in any meaningful manner. It is unfortunate that many DPOs feel uncomfortable engaging their governments – and still sometimes mistakenly view NHRIs as government agencies. This meeting was an opportunity to make some real progress in what will hopefully be a long and rich partnership. It is important to note that the partnership must be between DPOs and disabled people directly as the international catch cry so often heard during the CRDP negotiation process says “Nothing about us without us!”

Koreans and Japanese disabled people were the largest groups of attendees, with representatives from the rest of the world a much smaller group. As someone who identifies as a disabled person I was able to have candid and often moving conversations with many other disabled people. It became very clear to me that many of them struggle with internalised stigma, and find it very difficult to deal with their daily experience of oppression and denial of human rights, such as the right to education and decent work which recognised abilities rather than deficits. There is much to be done.

Themes emerging from the conference

Partnership was a strong theme throughout the conference. Partnerships between DPOs and NHRIs, DPOs and governments and DPOs and the UN were discussed and explored in plenaries and workshops.

Workshops focused on the various articles of the Convention, and there was a strong disabled women’s stream with an emphasis on their experience of violence and sexual exploitation and reproductive rights. It was pleasing to see an emerging indigenous stream, with workshops from Australia, North America and New Zealand.

Education about the Convention

The University of Minnesota Human Rights Center in partnership with DPI is developing an action and advocacy human rights training curriculum focussed on Articles one through seventeen of the Convention, as well as including sections on human rights and a facilitator’s guide. Human Rights YES! Is a manual style teaching tool for disability rights advocates and activists. Draft chapters were previewed at the assembly and received a positive response.

The resource will be available this December and will be accompanied by a web site where human rights educators can share experiences and contribute to the organic development of the basic tool. The site can be found at www.humanrightsyeyes.org

The manual will be freely downloadable in various formats as well as being published in hard copy. Official languages will be English, French, Spanish and Arabic. Other translations may be undertaken for those who wish to have the manual in their own languages.

While the primary audience will be grassroots disabled people, the manual may be of value to NHRIs, other organisation and non-disabled people who wish to learn about the Convention.

Next steps

The concluding assembly statement (attached) includes references to NHRIs. Since the Assembly I have had contact with DPI international representatives who have also expressed interest in continuing the dialogue.

Conclusions

In conclusion I wish to acknowledge the support of APF to participate in this conference, and thank APF for funding my attendance at the assembly.

The presence of NHRIs was of value to participants at the Assembly, and their participation in the Town Hall Meeting dialogue was evidence of this. This population has historically had little contact with human rights organisations and human rights approaches so dialogue in a variety of forms should continue to be supported to assist DPOs to incorporate human rights in their work, to help them to work alongside others towards ratification and to build capacity for participation in implementation and monitoring.

Recommendations

That APF welcome the recommendations in the concluding DPI statement which concern NHRIs

That the APF working party on the Convention continue with a new focus on ratification and implementation of the Convention. Its role would be

- (1) To continue to work on national monitoring frameworks including engaging with international DPOs and other parites
- (2) To continue to engage in the development of international monitoring mechanisms.
- (3)To engage with regional and international DPOs in relation to implementation and monitoring

That APF encourage member institutions to engage with national DPOs amd governments to facilitate ratification and implementation

That APF and member institutions promote education about the Convention.

That APF request the ICC to take account of the DPI Seoul Declaration of September 8 2007 in its work

Robyn Hunt
Human Rights Commissioner
New Zealand Human Rights Commission
September 2007

Attachments

Presentation Notes
Assembly Programme
Assembly Concluding Statement The Seoul Declaration

The Seoul Declaration, adopted at Disabled Peoples' International World Assembly on 8 September, 2007:

There are no human rights to which persons with disabilities do not lay claim. Upon this foundational principle at our last World Assembly in Sapporo, Disabled Peoples' International called upon Member States of the United Nations to adopt of a specific international human rights treaty on the rights of persons with disabilities.

Today, five years later, as a result of unprecedented collaboration by UN Member States, the international disability community, our global leaders and our allies, we have achieved this and much more. On December 13, 2006, the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol. Negotiated in record time, with record participation, and signed on its opening day by a record number of countries, the Convention reflects our language and vision of disability rights. The Convention is not just about persons with disabilities, it is by us and for us and all of humanity: our rights our convention but for all.

Now, celebrating our achievements as we also celebrate DPI's quarter century of engagement in the struggle for human rights for all disabled people, the time has come to prepare ourselves and our allies for the future and our participation in ratification and implementation of this historic new treaty. We the 2700 people of DPI gathered here in Seoul for our 7th World Assembly, declare that the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as a core international human rights treaty, shall be the foundation for all laws, policies and practices addressing the rights of persons with disabilities. Therefore we call on:

- All Governments, including the Republic of Korea, to move swiftly and with conviction to sign and ratify the Convention, so that it may enter into force by December 13th, 2007.
- All States Parties to vigorously uphold their treaty obligations, working with us to breathe life into the words of the Convention, so that its vision may be reflected in the everyday lives of all people with disabilities.
- All international human rights bodies and mechanisms to engage people with disabilities, so that the standards set by the Convention are fully reflected in their work.
- All UN agencies to actively include disability and people with disabilities in their programming, so that the international cooperation they promote furthers the objectives of the Convention.
- All National Human Rights Institutions to promote awareness, knowledge of and compliance with the Convention, so that national-level implementation may become a reality.
- All Development Agencies to fully utilize the Convention as a tool in achieving the Millennium Development Goals, so that all people with disabilities may benefit equally from full and sustainable development.

- All members of Civil Society to commit to Convention ratification and implementation, so that we may work in partnership to achieve our common goal of a just and equal society for all.
- All our sisters and brothers in the struggle for disability liberation to make Convention ratification and implementation a priority in their work, so that together we may finally realize the human rights to which we have always laid claim.

We ask that you share this declaration with persons with disabilities, government and non-government organizations so that our voices can be heard.