

Dr Morna Nance, British Council India

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Dr Justice A S Anand, Chairperson National Human Rights Commission of India

Mark Runacres, Acting British High Commissioner to India

Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good afternoon. I am Morna Nance, Acting Director of the British Council in India. It is my great pleasure to welcome you here today and to welcome you to Delhi although weather-wise it's definitely not the best time to be visiting this fascinating city. We have in this hall this evening delegates from all over the world, from more than twenty countries, who have come to participate in this workshop entitled "Promoting the rights of people with disabilities: towards a new UN convention".

I am sure that not many people outside of this room are aware of the fact that over 600 million people – that is almost ten per cent of the world's population - have a disability of one form or the other. Disability is as pervasive a dimension of human diversity as gender, race and culture. When the human rights of people with disabilities are violated, they are doubly disadvantaged. These violations include malnutrition, forced sterilisation, sexual exploitation, denial of educational and vocational training opportunities, inaccessible public services, institutionalisation and denial of voting rights – violations which continue all over the world. There is, however, no specific binding international human rights treaty similar to ones that exist on racial discrimination, discrimination against women, or the rights of children.

This brings me to the topic of the workshop. As increasing international attention is fortunately now being paid to the protection of the human rights of people with disabilities, the subject of the workshop reflects the current international debate on disability rights. The UN has invited National Human Rights Institutions to contribute to the process of formulating a UN convention on Disability. The year 2003 is also the European Year of Disability. The city of Delhi was chosen to host the workshop in acknowledgement of the considerable achievements of the National Human Rights Commission of India on disability rights and of the many active disability NGOs in India. We very much welcome the participation of a number of leading Indian disability NGOs in the workshop.

The timing of the workshop is also crucial. It precedes the UN Ad Hoc Committee meeting on Disability which is due to be held next month in New York. Your deliberations over the next three days and the recommendations you agree, will make a major contribution to the Ad Hoc Committee meeting and give a voice to your concerns on the rights of people with disabilities.

We at the British Council are delighted to have had the opportunity to organise this workshop as part of a series of workshops we are organising for Commonwealth Human Rights Commissions. We hope that as a result, National Human Rights Commissions across the Commonwealth will further network together and share experiences to enable them to carry out their key statutory functions, that they will expand the range of activities recognised by their governments as falling within their remit and will also raise their credibility and standing both nationally and internationally. The workshop will undoubtedly strengthen the efforts of national human rights

institutions to play an effective and strategic role in the development of the proposed new Convention on disability.

This workshop would not of course have been possible without our partners, the National Human Rights Commission India, the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. Funding has been generously provided by the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights with some funding also from the British Council. The collaboration between all our organisations in the delivery of the workshop has been excellent. I am delighted to welcome today the Acting British High Commissioner, Mark Runacres; Orest Nowosad from the UN Office and Dr Justice A S Anand, Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission.

Let me finish by saying that I am confident that this workshop will indeed be a learning and sharing platform and will reflect the aspirations of people with disabilities. I thank you once again for joining us here today and look forward to energetic debates and lively discussions over the next few days, as we look forward to a more just world for all irrespective of their abilities.

Thank you