

Promoting the Rights of People with Disabilities: Towards a New UN Convention



World Programme of Action

**UN Resolution 34/52
of
3 December 1982**

Background

- General Assembly (GA) Resolution 31/123 of 16 December 1976 proclaimed year 1981 as the International Year of Disabled Persons (IYDP) and in 1979 expanded the theme of IYDP to “Full participation and equality”.
- More than 500 million persons were suffering from disabilities.

- There was a need to continue to promote the realisation of rights of PWDs and for them to participate fully in social life and enjoy benefits of social and economic development.
- The IYDP gave an impetus to activities related to realisation of opportunities for PWDs and to improve their conditions and well-being and to involve them and disabilities organisations in matters of concern to them.

- Considered the Vienna Affirmative Action Plan adopted by the World Symposium of Experts on Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries and Technical Assistance in Disability Prevention and Rehabilitation.
- Adopted the World Programme of Action (WPA) concerning Disabled Persons as recommendation of report of the Advisory Committee for the IYDP.

Emergence of the rights model in the 1980s

1980s marked an irreversible shift from the “caring” to the “rights” model with the WPA in 1982 and 1983 to 1992 proclaimed as International Decade of Disabled Persons.

Features of WPA

- WPA is the first international instrument to address the advancement of PWDs in a broad developmental framework.
- WPA has 2 goals - full participation of PWDs in social life and development AND equality.

- 3 operational objectives: 1) prevention of impairment, disability and handicap, 2) rehabilitation; 3) equalisation of opportunities for PWDs.
- The first 2 objectives are those of the “caring” model while the 3rd is a shift to a “rights” based model.

- WPA broadens the concept of human rights by explicitly recognising the right of every person to have opportunities equal to the population as a whole and an equal share in improvements in living conditions resulting from social and economic development.
- In order to provide a framework for action to further implement the WPA, the GA declared 1983 to 1992 as UN Decade of Disabled Persons.

WPA definition of “equalisation of opportunities”

“The process through which the general system of society, such as the physical and cultural environment, housing and transportation, social and health services, educational and work opportunities, cultural and social life, including sports and recreational facilities, are made accessible to all” (paragraph 12)

Achieving “equality of opportunities”
necessitate measures beyond
traditional rehabilitative ones to
tackling structural exclusion in areas
mentioned in paragraph 12.

Implementation of WPA

- Special representative of UN Sec. Gen. appointed to oversee progress of aims of decade.
- WPA calls for development of long term national plans by countries to create through legislation, the necessary legal bases and authority for measures to achieve the objectives.

- To ensure opportunities by eliminating barriers to full participation.
- To support the establishment and growth of organisations of disabled persons.
- Goal of equalizing opportunities is described under headings of legislation, physical environment, income maintenance and social security education and training, employment, recreation, culture, religion and sports (paragraph 108 to 138).

Review of WPA (national, regional and international levels)

- 1st international review in 1987 in Stockholm - recommended the convening of a special conference to draft a convention on the human rights of PWDs (Italy 1987, Sweden 1989 raised issue at GA but to no avail)

- In 1989, the GA adopted the Tallinn Guidelines for Action in Human Resources Development in the Field of Disability which provides a strategic framework for promoting participation, training and employment of PWDs in countries.
- 2nd international review in 1992 noted that implementation of WPA was constrained by poverty, disease, war and other factors and that PWDs were not playing an integral role in decision making process.

- Countries had not adopted comprehensive national programmes and it was too early to see if efforts to “equalise opportunities” would succeed.
- In 1993, the GA adopted the Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for PWDs.

- In 1994, GA endorsed the Long Term Strategy to Implement the WPA to the Year 2000 and Beyond which outlines a sequence of actions for the period 1995 - 2010 with targets, timeframe and support measures at regional and international levels to contribute to the realisation of a “society for all by the year 2010”.

- 1997 Review contains a summary of relevant developments throughout 1990s.
- UN Voluntary Fund on Disability established in 1981 during IYDP was extended beyond decade to give awards for projects on promotion of awareness of disability issues, national and institutional capacity building; data collection, research and evaluation and dissemination of appropriate disability technologies.

Link between UN Human Rights Instruments and WPA

- Paragraph 164 of WPA establishes a direct link between UN human rights instruments and the disability agenda.
- This was reiterated in 2000 by UN Commission on Human Rights Resolution 2000/51 on the human rights of PWDs to the effect that any breach of the Standard Rules is an infringement of human rights.

Current Status

(UN GA Res. 56/115)

19 December 2001

- Improvement of awareness of and sensitivity to disability issues and respect for the human rights of PWDs have not been significant enough to improve the quality of life of PWDs worldwide.
- Situations of armed conflict continue to have devastating consequences for the human rights of PWDs.

WE NEED TO: -

- Advance beyond the adoption of national plans for PWDs through the creation or reinforcement of arrangements for the promotion and awareness of disabilities issues and allocation of sufficient resources for the full implementation of existing plans and initiatives.

- Hold public information campaigns by, for and with PWDs to increase awareness and sensitivity to disabilities issues, to combat and overcome discrimination against PWDs and further their full and effective participation in society.
- Involve PWDs in the formulation of strategies and plans aimed at eradicating poverty, promoting education and enhancing employment.

- Provide special protection to children, girls, women and elderly people with disabilities and persons with developmental and psychiatric disabilities, with special emphasis on integrating them into society and protecting and promoting their human rights.

- Promote further equalisation of opportunities for PWDs by focusing on accessibility, health, education, social services, training and rehabilitation, safety nets, employment and sustainable livelihoods, in the design and implementation of strategies, policies and programmes to promote a more inclusive society.



Thank you