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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WORLD PROGRAMME OF ACTION CONCERNING DISABLED PERSONS AND THE UNITED NATIONS DECADE OF DISABLED PERSONS

Evaluation of the implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons During the First Half of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The General Assembly, in its resolution 37/52 of 3 December 1982, adopted the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons; in its resolution 37/53 of 3 December 1982, the Assembly proclaimed the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons, 1983-1992, and requested the Secretary-General to explore the possibility of convening in 1987 a meeting of experts, composed mainly of disabled persons, to prepare a report that would enable him to help the Assembly at its forty-second session to evaluate the implementation of the World Programme of Action, as provided for in resolution 39/26 of 23 November 1984.
2. The present report has been prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 39/26.
3. Further to the request of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General convened the Global Meeting of Experts to Review the Implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons at the Mid-Point of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons from 17 to 22 August 1987 at Stockholm, at the invitation of the Government of Sweden. The Meeting was the first major international event of the Decade to be organized by the United Nations.
4. The Global Meeting, preceded by regional meetings organized by different regional entities, included 23 experts in the field of disability, selected in their individual capacities and on the basis of equitable geographical distribution. Also attending as observers were more than 30 representatives from the United Nations system and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. The six-day Meeting represented the first such occasion on which the majority of the experts (15) were persons with disabilities. It was also the first time that a United Nations meeting used sign language interpretation, as well as documentation in Braille and audio-cassette form, made possible through the Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons, as well as the support and co-operation of external sources.
5. Taking into account the financial and time constraints of the Global Meeting, its agenda focused on two main points: first, selected issues of the highest priority, such as prevention, rehabilitation, equalization of opportunities and the role of disabled people and their organizations; and second, the identification of priority areas for action during the remainder of the Decade.
6. The documentation for the Global Meeting included: Provisional agenda (CSDHA/DDP/GME/1); Annotated provisional agenda (CSDHA/DDP/GME/2); Report on analysis of monitoring questionnaire (CSDHA/DDP/GME/3); Development of statistics for monitoring the implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons, 1983-1992 (CSDHA/DDP/GME/4); and Consolidated findings and recommendations emanating from regional reports regarding the 1987 review of the implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons (CSDHA/DDP/GME/5).

7. The report on analysis of monitoring questionnaire, first circulated in 1985, was prepared by the Secretariat. Based on replies from 82 Governments, it examined, from the perspective of those Governments, the extent to which there has been progress in achieving the goals of the World Programme of Action, and analysed existing trends and ways of accelerating progress. Moreover, the United Nations Statistical Office, with support from the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons, prepared a working document, in which statistical sources on disability were identified and documented for 76 countries or areas for the period 1980-1986, and for an additional 19 countries or areas for the period 1960-1979.

8. On the occasion of the Global Meeting and for the first time, 12 individuals and organizations were awarded special testimonials by the United Nations in appreciation of their service to the cause of disabled persons.

II. CONSIDERATION OF THE PROGRESS MADE AND OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WORLD PROGRAMME OF ACTION CONCERNING DISABLED PERSONS

9. The Global Meeting of Experts recognized that the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons remains a valuable guide for those seeking to improve the economic, social and physical conditions of disabled people. It was seen to have set forth a new and challenging approach to disability and thus to represent a step forward in social thinking. However, the Global Meeting found that the World Programme of Action was not well known and, therefore, had not been widely implemented during the first half of the Decade.

10. Among the major achievements of the first five years of the Decade, identified at the Global Meeting, were the increased awareness of the problems and rights of persons suffering from physical, mental and sensorial disabilities; the growth of organizations of disabled people; the substantial increase in the number of national population censuses or household surveys with disability-related questions; and a growing application of the concept of community-based services.

11. The obstacles to progress identified at the Global Meeting included: resource constraints in the United Nations affecting its leadership role in the promotion of the Decade and the World Programme of Action; insufficient and inadequate information on the Decade; the limited resources available and the low priority assigned to programmes related to disability in most countries; the lack of participation by disabled persons in the decision-making process; and the lack of co-ordination at the national, regional and international levels. Moreover, specific reference was made to the fact that, in most countries, especially in the developing world, there were no comprehensive social security systems to provide assistance to disabled persons and their families.

12. At the Global Meeting, it was acknowledged that several groups in the population which included large numbers of disabled persons had received little attention. Those groups included persons with mental impairment, disabled women, persons with hearing impairment, the elderly disabled, disabled children without family or from migrant families or refugee families, disabled migrants and refugees, and people with multiple disabilities.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION DURING THE SECOND HALF OF THE DECADE

13. Recognizing the imperative and urgent need to reactivate the Decade and to promote the more vigorous implementation of the objectives of the World Programme of Action, the Global Meeting of Experts requested the General Assembly to give higher priority to the promotion of the Decade through a number of measures. It adopted 30 recommendations for action at all levels during the second half of the Decade. The recommendations addressed to the United Nations are presented below.

14. Among the recommendations for action at the international level, the Global Meeting requested the General Assembly to convene a special conference on the human rights of disabled people, with the mandate to elucidate such rights and to draft an international convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination, to be ratified by States by the end of the Decade.

15. In reviewing this recommendation, the General Assembly may wish to consider as a possible alternative the advisability of setting up an intergovernmental working group to consider the steps necessary for the drafting of such a convention and a suitable timetable to ensure its implementation before the end of the Decade.

16. The Global Meeting also requested the General Assembly to launch a comprehensive public information and education campaign portraying disabled people as equal members of society. It is noted that public information/education had always been considered to be one of the priority areas in promoting the World Programme of Action. It should be stressed, however, that the General Assembly proclaimed the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons with no additional resources provided for its activities.

17. Special planning for United Nations activities in this area could include: reprinting and disseminating the World Programme of Action in ink-print, Braille and/or audio-cassette form, devising new and innovative means of publicizing the Decade, and taking into consideration the special needs of persons with visual and hearing impairments by ensuring the systematic reproduction of materials in suitable forms. Ways for the United Nations to ensure access to United Nations material in forms suitable for persons with sight or hearing impairments may also be explored.

18. It may also be useful to rationalize the work by focusing the attention of public information activities on a different issue for each remaining year of the Decade. Taking into account the discussions of the Global Meeting of Experts regarding population groups deserving special attention, focus could be placed each year on one of the following categories: (a) disabled women; (b) persons with mental disabilities; (c) elderly disabled persons; (d) persons with hearing impairment; (e) disabled refugees and migrants; and (f) persons with multiple disabilities. This kind of activity could be carried out in connection with other existing ongoing programmes concerning these specific population groups.

19. The Global Meeting also requested the United Nations to set up a secretariat for the remainder of the Decade, similar to that established for the International Year of Disabled Persons. It was recommended that the secretariat should be under the direct supervision of the Head of the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs. For the effective implementation of the programmes and activities to be carried out by the secretariat, it was further recommended that both budgetary and extrabudgetary funds should be directly available to the Head of the Centre.

20. During the International Year of Disabled Persons, in order to co-ordinate the technical and administrative measures taken to implement the International Year of Disabled Persons Plan of Action, a secretariat for the year had been established within the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs. After the celebration of the Year, the secretariat was disbanded and a new organizational structure, the Disabled Persons Unit, which forms an integral part of the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, was set up.

21. The Global Meeting also requested that an advisory council of experts with a high level of experience in disability be established, according to United Nations practice, to give expert advice to the Head of the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs in the planning and implementation of relevant programmes and activities; in establishing this council, due consideration should be given to the appropriate representation of disabled persons.

22. With regard to technical co-operation activities, the Global Meeting requested that Governments include projects on disability prevention, education and training of disabled persons and their social integration in technical co-operation programmes financed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and that development co-operation agencies and bodies co-operate with organizations of disabled persons to ensure that their budgets include programmes that benefit and are accessible to disabled persons. It further recommended that the Administrator of UNDP be entrusted with the management of a mechanism to fund projects and activities to promote the purposes of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons and that this mechanism be advised by a committee comprised primarily of disabled persons.

23. The General Assembly has repeatedly invited Member States to accord high priority to projects and activities of benefit to disabled persons, and his reports to the General Assembly on the implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons have documented progress achieved in this area. Moreover, the General Assembly reaffirmed at its forty-first session, in 1986, that the resources of the Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons should be used to support catalytic and innovative activities to implement further the objectives of the World Programme of Action within the framework of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons, with priority to programmes and projects of least developed countries.

24. Since becoming operational in 1980, the Fund has provided nearly \$US 2 million to 78 projects and activities which aim at furthering the implementation of the World Programme of Action. By the mid-point of the Decade, two thirds of the

resources of the Fund had been disbursed for building national and regional capacities in the disability field. In addition, more than three fifths of the Fund-assisted projects were implemented by organizations of, or concerned with disabled persons. Working in close co-operation with Governments, concerned members of the United Nations system for development co-operation and organizations of disabled persons, the Fund has provided seed-money, which has been instrumental in ensuring that catalytic and innovative activities in the disability field, not presently covered by other members of the United Nations system, are carried out and that disability-related concerns are effectively incorporated in mainstream development efforts. In this way, the Fund provides an important complement to disability-related activities by the United Nations system as a whole.

25. As part of the new arrangements in Vienna, managerial responsibilities for the Fund were transferred from the Under-Secretary-General for International Economic and Social Affairs to the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Vienna. Consequently, managerial and substantive responsibilities for Fund operations have been consolidated at one duty station. Financial review of grants to be made from the resources of the Fund remains with the Department of Administration and Management at United Nations Headquarters. In addition, the operations of the Fund have been reinforced and streamlined through the establishment in the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs of a Trust Fund Operations Committee, which, inter alia, reviews project funding proposals prior to the submission of funding recommendations for financial approval. This has also served to strengthen the interdisciplinary content of the operations of the Fund.

26. It is, however, not clear whether the recommendation of the Global Meeting is for a new fund to be set up within UNDP or for the existing Voluntary Fund to be transferred to UNDP. A new fund would clearly duplicate efforts. The existing Fund should be retained at the site of the focal point for the Decade, that is to say in the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs. The Fund has been playing an essential role, both substantively and financially, in furthering the implementation of the objectives of the World Programme of Action, and has been constrained only by the lack of adequate resources. The current management and administrative arrangements for the Fund in their streamlined and improved form are well-suited to the requirements envisaged during the second half of the Decade and beyond. The continued availability of this instrument in Vienna remains vital to the successful execution of the measures being taken by the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Vienna to reinvigorate the activities of the United Nations in support of the World Programme of Action.

27. It is noted that the level of contributions to the Fund has declined, as indicated in paragraphs 52 and 53 of the report on the implementation of the World Programme of Action (A/42/551). As part of the efforts to remedy this situation, the Fund participates in the annual pledging conferences for United Nations operational activities and, pursuant to guidance received from the General Assembly, circulates periodically a select annotated list of project proposals awaiting financing. Consultations with organizations of or concerned with disabled persons could be instituted in the biennium 1988-1989, within the framework of United Nations inter-agency meetings on the Decade, with a view to enhancing the role of the Fund as well as to broadening and increasing its sources of financial support.

28. The Global Meeting urged the United Nations to take immediate action to implement one of the main themes of the World Programme of Action, namely, consultation with organizations representing disabled people to allow them to monitor and evaluate within each body all plans, projects and activities concerning disabled people. In order to make such consultation possible, the Global Meeting requested that the funding of organizations of disabled people be given the highest priority by the United Nations and Governments, with special emphasis on training in leadership and income-generation.

29. The Global Meeting requested the Secretary-General to implement an international information system with co-ordinated procedures for collection, compilation and distribution of information; to this end, items about disability should be included in regular population census reports and national household surveys, and all countries should be urged to contribute the resulting data to the United Nations. It recommended that the concepts and language of the World Programme of Action should be used in surveys and information programmes, and that organizations concerned with disabled people should be involved in the planning and implementation of such surveys and information programmes. The Global Meeting further requested that such an information system should be accessible to disabled people, whatever their impairment.

30. The fifth inter-agency meeting on the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons held at Vienna from 18 to 20 February 1987, recommended the establishment of an information network on disability, to be located in the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs and linked with existing data banks inside and outside the United Nations system. It requested a feasibility study on the resource requirements before further consideration of this project.

31. A preliminary study is being undertaken as soon as possible to ascertain the requirements and time-frame for such a project, so that it could be completed during the second half of the Decade. In this undertaking, the Secretary-General is seeking to enlist the support and co-operation of those countries and organizations which have accumulated some experience in this field.

32. The Global Meeting also requested that the United Nations convene meetings of decision makers from both developed and developing countries to emphasize the importance of implementing the World Programme of Action and to develop procedures for co-operation in this regard. It further requested that a series of technical meetings take place before 1992, at which time a global conference should be held, similar to that held at the end of the United Nations Decade for Women, to develop follow-up initiatives for the Decade to the year 2000.

33. The Global Meeting further urged the United Nations to formulate and implement a personnel policy designed to employ more disabled persons in the United Nations system. In this regard, the Secretary-General was requested to report annually to the General Assembly on the status of disabled persons employed in the United Nations system.

34. It is noted that similar requests have been made in General Assembly resolutions 37/53 of 18 February 1983 and 39/26 of 21 December 1984, respectively. In response to those resolutions, the Secretary-General informed the General Assembly at its thirty-ninth, fortieth and forty-first sessions of developments in matters concerning employment of disabled persons within the United Nations system (A/39/191, paras. 110-114, A/40/728, paras. 37-49, and A/41/605, paras. 32-35).

35. Similarly, the question of equal employment opportunities for disabled persons within the United Nations system has been on the agenda of the inter-agency meetings on the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons since 1983. Further to discussions at the third and fourth inter-agency meetings, the Office of Human Resources Management prepared a draft plan for the employment of disabled persons in the United Nations system. At the fifth inter-agency meeting in early 1987, it was noted that the draft plan was being reviewed by the staff-management mechanisms of the United Nations Secretariat, after which it would be finalized.

36. The Global Meeting recommended that a complete report on the Disability Statistics Data Base should be prepared by the Secretary-General and made available to interested Governments and non-governmental organizations, including organizations of disabled persons and researchers, as well as to the United Nations system for further analysis and policy applications. In this regard, in the regular programme of the United Nations Statistical Office efforts are continuing to develop and disseminate statistics and indicators on disability.

37. Another recommendation of the Global Meeting was that international efforts should be made towards the preparation of country profiles on existing legislation regarding disability, its implementation and enforcement in order to clarify the current status of this legislation and to prepare guidelines, where none exist, for comprehensive legislation to promote and protect the rights of disabled persons.

38. The Secretary-General notes that an International Expert Meeting on Legislation for Equalization of Opportunities for people with Disabilities was convened at Vienna from 2 to 6 June 1986 with collaboration between the United Nations and an international non-governmental organization, Rehabilitation International. The recommendations of that meeting could serve as a guide to making legislation an important tool for changing social policy and confirming the fundamental rights of disabled people as citizens within society.

39. The Global Meeting also requested that sign language interpretation be made available when needed at meetings of the United Nations system.

40. In recent years, the United Nations commissioned three studies on access to documents and information for persons with sensorial disabilities, which were undertaken by consultants who are themselves disabled. The recommendations contained therein are being implemented to the extent feasible.

41. At the regional level, the Global Meeting requested that the regional commissions, particularly in the developing world, be strengthened as focal points for the promotion of technical co-operation activities and the sharing of national

resources for purposes of personnel training, exchange of information, policy and programme development, and research. It also requested that the activities or services for technical co-operation support be encouraged.

42. Regional inputs to the Global Meeting of Experts demonstrated the concern and need for co-ordinated efforts to maximize the scarce resources available at the national level.

43. Among its recommendations for action at the national level, the Global Meeting considered, inter alia: the need for comprehensive legislation to ensure the civil rights of people with disabilities; the need for special guidelines to deal with the specific rights of people with communications disabilities; and the importance of including projects for the prevention of disability, education or training of disabled persons and their socio-economic integration into society in technical co-operation programmes.

44. Also mentioned in the recommendations for action at the national level was the need for priority attention to be given to: the development of organizations of disabled persons; programmes to implement the right of disabled persons to employment; the extension of social security systems to provide services and support for disabled people and their families; the maximum use of existing facilities and services for disability prevention and rehabilitation; the improvement of the situation of disabled women; and the development of services and facilities to assist the rehabilitation and equalization of opportunities of people in the following groups: mentally ill and other mentally-impaired people, multiple disabled persons, elderly disabled persons, disabled refugees and migrants, and individuals who are intellectually disabled.

IV. OTHER SPECIAL AREAS FOR ACTION

45. The Global Meeting of Experts also highlighted other special areas for action during the second half of the Decade, including the problem of mobilization of resources. The Meeting noted with interest the proposal made at the 1986 session of the Governing Council of UNDP that a global campaign be promoted to raise awareness and mobilize resources in support of the objectives of the World Programme of Action. A successful global event of this nature with full participation of non-governmental organizations could provide a valuable link with ongoing public information and education activities aimed at focusing attention on the Decade and the World Programme of Action in all countries, and could also generate much needed financial support.

46. The Global Meeting also stressed that co-operation between the United Nations focal point on disability at Vienna and intergovernmental regional organizations should be increased during the second half of the Decade.

V. CONCLUSIONS

47. The recommendations of the Global Meeting reflect an increasing concern that the momentum of the International Year of Disabled Persons has not been fully maintained during the Decade. They also make clear that the international community expects strong leadership from the United Nations, especially during the second half of the Decade. This international leadership role could be effected through a number of measures, which, assuming that voluntary contributions would not be available, would require resources in amounts *prima facie* exceeding those provided in the proposed 1988-1989 programme budget. Such measures might include:

(a) Strengthening the United Nations focal point in the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, which is responsible for the global implementation of the World Programme of Action in all of its aspects;

(b) Strengthening information activities to enable it to respond to the special requirements of the second half of the Decade;

(c) Mobilizing additional resources from both Governments and the private sector, so that the Voluntary Fund can respond effectively to the considerable and growing demand for assistance in the disability field for the remainder of the Decade and beyond; and strengthening technical co-operation activities in the disability-related field.

48. An important prerequisite for international and regional level activities is the strengthening of national co-ordinating mechanisms, which should be given technical and financial support. These national mechanisms have been recognized as one of the essential elements in the implementation of the World Programme of Action.

49. In view of the emerging role that disabled people and their organizations are playing in the implementation of the World Programme of Action, concerted efforts are also required at all levels to ensure their participation in the decisions that affect the lives of disabled people.

50. The Secretary-General wishes to reiterate his full support of the objectives of the Decade of Disabled Persons. He notes that the implementation of the recommendations made at the Global Meeting would have significant programme and budgetary implications and wishes to express his gratitude to those Governments which have given offers of assistance in that regard. The Secretary-General will continue to review the measures proposed in the light of the consideration of the present report by the General Assembly at its forty-second session.
