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SECRETARY-GENERAL'S REPORT ON THE POSSIBILITY OF
CREATING AN OPTIONAL INTERNATIONAL IDENTITY
CARD FOR DISABLED PERSONS WITH THE PURPOSE
OF FACILITATING INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL OF
DISABLED PERSONS

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A. Introduction

1. Two goals were set forth in the theme of the International Year of Disabled Persons (IYDP): active participation and equalization of opportunities of disabled persons. Societies should undertake the necessary measures to facilitate active participation of disabled persons in the development process, and to ensure that they derive appropriate benefits therefrom.

2. One of the major outcomes of the International Year of Disabled Persons will be the establishment of a long-term programme of action for the prevention of disability, rehabilitation and equalization of opportunities for disabled persons. Societies should be able to respond more fully and appropriately to the special needs of disabled persons in developing their potentials. To this end, international travel can facilitate the participation of disabled persons in the development process, and enhance their share in improved living conditions.

B. Legislative background

3. In operative paragraph 7 of resolution A/36/77, the United Nations General Assembly requested the Advisory Committee for the International Year of Disabled Persons to study the possibility of creating an optional international identity card for disabled persons, with the purpose of facilitating the international travel of disabled persons. The General Assembly also requested the Advisory Committee to report to the thirty-seventh session of the General Assembly on its findings on the subject. This present report has been prepared to facilitate the deliberations of the Advisory Committee on this item, and has been produced on the basis of comments and suggestions received by the Secretary-General from United Nations organizations and programmes, specialized agencies of the United Nations system, relevant non-governmental organizations and National Committees for the IYDP in the various Member States. ^{1/}

C. The problem

4. Disabled persons encounter special difficulties when travelling and staying abroad. The problems involved are extensive and variable, depending upon the degree and type of disability affecting the individual person. Difficulties in mobility, accessibility of premises and environment, as well as a lack of transportation facilities, may hinder disabled persons from enjoying a proportionate share of the benefits of international travel.

5. Disabled persons do not constitute a homogenous group, since there are different categories and groups of disabilities, comprised of persons with diverse needs and requirements.

^{1/} A complete list of organizations which have responded on the subject is attached to this report, page 9.

6. Persons with impaired vision, persons with impaired hearing, persons in wheelchairs, and mentally ill and mentally retarded persons will require special facilities when travelling and staying abroad. Arrangements will have to be provided for them at airports, seaports, road and rail borders, and on transportation vehicles, etc. In hotels, or at their destinations, they will require the premises to be made accessible.

D. General remarks

7. Most of the organizations responded favourably to the creation of an optional international identity card for disabled persons. In welcoming the principle of the identity card, they underlined its usefulness to disabled persons in international travel. Especially, the optional use of the identity card has been generally accepted by almost all responding organizations, and they have also expressed their willingness to co-operate in the creation of such an identity card which would facilitate the international travel of disabled persons.

8. Several of the responding organizations indicated that they would be commenting further on the subject at a later date, after the competent authorities and experts have had detailed and thorough discussions on the matter of the optional international identity card for disabled persons. Their comments would be forthcoming when criteria for services and special facilities to be granted to the holders of such an identity card have been established.

E. Administrative measures

9. Some organizations suggested some parameters that will have to be accounted for when creating an optional international identity card for disabled persons. Because of the international nature of such a card, administrative measures will have to be undertaken, such as determining the point from which such cards can be issued, and whether they should be issued at the national or international level.

10. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) suggested that an international identity card should contain the UNDP emblem and that of the issuing agency or the United Nations. The UNHCR also felt that the card could be prepared by the CSDHA or the issuing agency of the United Nations system, and that the UNDP in general and UNHCR or other such agencies dealing with specific groups of disabled persons may be designated as the agency for issuing international identity cards.

11. For its part, the Universal Federation of Travel Agents' Associations (UFTAA), would be prepared to arrive at an agreement with the purveyors of tourist services, telex or computer communications, so as to be able to identify the nature and criteria of special requirements of disabled persons when travelling and staying abroad.

12. The International Union of Public Transport (IUTP) suggested that the letter "D" and a representation of the standardized pictogram on a card identifying the holder might be suitable.

13. The International Union of Public Transport, in underlining its desire to cater to the needs of disabled travellers, referred to the resolution on the subject of the carriage of disabled passengers, which was adopted by the UITP² International Congress, as well as to resolutions in generally similar terms by the Metropolitan Railways Committee of the UITP and by the Union's International Commission on Economic Problems.

F. Accessibility measures

14. Several responding organizations expressed the view that hotels and other holiday accommodations should give high priority to making their premises accessible to disabled travellers, and to consider providing holders of an identity card with mobility and other facilities. Such facilities could be standardized to ensure uniformity.

15. Some organizations voiced the opinion that the problems of architectural barriers would first have to be resolved, since such barriers prevent disabled persons from having access to aircraft, trains, buses and other means of transport, which in turn prevents disabled persons from partaking fully of international travel.

G. International agreement

16. The International Labour Organisation (ILO), while welcoming the principle of the identity card, pointed out that before such a card can be established, an internationally recognized definition of disability must be agreed upon, or such an identity card without this definition will have no meaning at all.

17. The ILO also pointed to the problem of ensuring international recognition of such an identity card, since standards of transport vary so much from country to country. The ILO further suggested that some kind of international agreement, similar to the Florence Agreement, 2/ might be necessary.

18. The World Council for the Welfare of the Blind (WCWB) suggested that it would be necessary to have an international agreement on who should be authorized to issue an identity card, i.e. should it be the responsibility of the Ministry of Health or Social Welfare, or the Ministry of Transport, or the organizations of disabled persons, or even a central committee in the respective country?

h. Information on existing identity cards

19. Some of the organizations consulted state that in the past few years, many organizations and travel agencies have created similar identity cards to facilitate the international travel of disabled persons. They also pointed out that such cards have already been created in some countries for national use by disabled persons.

2/ UNESCO General Conference, fifth session, Florence, 1950.

20. The World Health Organization (WHO) indicated that the establishment of an identity card for disabled persons is supported by its rehabilitation programme, and also referred to the fact that the issue is being promoted by the Federal Agency of Travel for the Handicapped (FATH) in New York.

21. The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) informed the Centre that it has introduced a document titled "Passport with Machine Readable Capability", which is a passport that can be used as either a free-standing card or in the form of conventional passport. This document contains technical specifications, which are supported by pertinent standards and recommendations of the International Organization for Standardization and by the Council of Europe. It has been designed primarily for clearance control purposes, but may also serve as a national identity card. It is issued by passport offices of the ICAO contracting States.

22. The Council of World Organizations Interested in the Handicapped (CWOIH) drew attention to the fact that various proposals for the creation of an international identity card for disabled persons had surfaced over the years, and had been discussed by member organizations of and for disabled persons.

23. The conclusions reached by CWOIH in these discussions had been the preference to include information that may facilitate international travel of disabled persons, as well as the provision of relevant services for them, in regular travel documents, such as national passports and identity cards.

24. In 1979 in Amsterdam, at a meeting sponsored by FATH, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) Committee agreed to issue Frequent Travellers Medical Cards (PREMEC), aimed at facilitating the air travel of disabled persons.

25. Some of the responding organizations referred to the fact that the Council of Europe has introduced such an identity card for disabled persons. This card was initially established for European war invalids, but was later extended to include other categories of disabled persons. Some country members of the Council of Europe have recognized the use of the card. Modalities for the use of the card vary from country to country, and the card contains a description of entitlements of the bearer.

1. Special benefits and privileges

26. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) stated that an identity card would be highly useful if it could offer some benefits to travelling disabled persons, such as a discount on tickets for those undertaking journeys other than on purely commercial purposes, and if the identity card gave access to facilities at the points of embarkation or disembarkation, as well as while on board the mode of travel.

27. Many responding organizations would like to see criteria established to determine whether holders of the identity card would be entitled to any special benefits, such as services or disability benefits in their countries of origin.

28. The Universal Federation of Travel Agents' Associations (UFTAA) expressed its willingness to co-operate in unifying generally-agreed upon rules on standardized facility provisions to holders of an optional international identity card. It would also be ready to disseminate information to its members and affiliated organizations on the use of such an identity card, suggesting to them that adequate treatment should be given to holders of the card.

29. Some responding organizations suggested that holders of the identity card should be given services in accordance with their disabilities, without any additional financial costs to be borne by the disabled, whether they are individual travellers or members of a group.

30. Several organizations suggested that the identity card should be carefully prepared, and control of entitlement to the card should be regulated. Some organizations would see to it that the card is accompanied by a clear account of specific advantages and privileges to be accorded to the holder of the identity card.

J. Disadvantages of the identity card

31. The International Youth Hostel Federation (IYHF) expressed the opinion that an identity card for disabled persons should not be created for the purpose, since it would single out disabled persons and tend to exclude them as regular travellers. However, the IYHF felt most strongly that pressure should be brought to bear upon tourist authorities, carriers and travel operators, to apply a flexible approach when handling bookings for disabled travellers, as a normal response to a given situation.

32. The World Council for the Welfare of the Blind (WCWB) referred to 'the disadvantages of the use of an optional international identity card for disabled persons, since they felt that the identity card "might be utilized to legalize begging in some parts of the world". The WCWB also believed that it would be difficult to decide to what degree a person should be considered disabled for him or her to be eligible for carrying such a card.

K. Conclusions

33. Of approximately 40 organizations consulted on the subject of the optional international identity card for disabled persons, over 15 replies were received. The majority of the responses were in favour of the creation of an identity card, with two of the replies being of a negative nature. Certain steps would have to be undertaken should the Advisory Committee for the International Year of Disabled Persons decide to create such an identity card:

- (i) An optional international identity card, whose primary purpose will be to facilitate international travel of disabled persons, would require the competent authorities at the international, regional and national levels to provide holders of the card with special services and facilities;

- (ii) Favourable environmental conditions would have to be created and administrative measures would have to be undertaken so as to establish minimum international standards of benefits and privileges to be given to holders of the identity card;
- (iii) The point of issuance of the card as well as the mechanism of distribution would have to be determined;
- (iv) An international agreement would have to be reached on the definition of "disabled person", so as to be able to determine who should be qualified to carry such a card.

References

General Assembly resolution A/36/471

General Assembly resolution A/36/77

Circular letter to National Committees of the IYDP

Letter to relevant non-governmental organizations and specialized agencies of the United Nations system

List of relevant non-governmental organizations

European identity card for severely disabled persons

Frequent Travellers Medical Card (FREMEC)

List of Governments, United Nations organizations and programmes, specialized agencies of the United Nations system, relevant non-governmental organizations, and National Committees for the International Year of Disabled Persons who responded on the subject of the optional international identity card for disabled persons:

Governments:

Denmark

Federal Republic of Germany

United Nations Organizations, Programmes and specialized agencies of the United Nations system:

United Nations Children's Fund

United Nations Industrial Development Organization

United Nations Development Programme - Sri Lanka and Maldives

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

International Labour Organisation

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

World Health Organization

Relevant Inter-Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations:

Council of European and Japanese National Shipowners Associations

Council of World Organizations Interested in the Handicapped

International Association of Ports and Harbours

International Civil Aviation Organization

International Union of Public Transport

International Youth Hostel Federation

Universal Federation of Travel Agents Associations

World Council for the Welfare of the Blind