

Thursday, December 4, 2014

# Calls for representation of persons with disabilities in parliament

Colourful event marks International Day for Persons with Disabilities; report launched

By A Reporter

ISLAMABAD: Ammara Anwar's life, as a person with a visual impairment, has never been easy. However, she says, it's not her disability that has caused her as much pain as the discouraging attitude of people around her.

"One day, when I was a child, I went to the park with my mother and my brother, who is also visually impaired. A woman who was walking there stopped and told my mother that we were a punishment from God and she should seek forgiveness from him," Ammara said.

She was speaking to participants at a dialogue titled 'Road Map for Justice and Equality for Persons with Disability (PWD)' organised to mark the International Day for Persons with Disabilities on Wednesday.

The event was organised by Aurat Foundation in collaboration with the Directorate General of Special Education (DGSE).

"As I grew older, I faced more difficulties. I wanted to do Bachelors in Business Administration but many universities rejected my application because I was not able to see. Fortunately I managed to complete my education but then when I started applying for jobs, my disability again became a problem. A bank told me that I could not have my own bank account because I will not be able to use a cheque book or an Automatic Teller Machine (ATM)," she said.

Sardar Ahmed Pirzada, who has been working as journalist, also has a visual impairment. He said that there are 20 million people with disabilities in Pakistan and around 70 million live with a disabled person.

"There should be a representation of people with disabilities, in the parliament, because that is the only way that their issues will be raised and policies will be made," he said.

Capital Administration and Development Division (CADD) Minister Barrister Usman Ibrahim assured the participants that steps will be taken to resolve the problems faced by persons with disabilities.

He said that the implementation of recommendations put forward in the policy dialogue will be a priority for the ministry.

Pakistan Baitul Mal Managing Director Barrister Abid Waheed Sheikh assured audience that census will be carried out to know the exact number of citizens living with disabilities.

Aurat Foundation Chief Coordinating Officer Naeem Mirza demanded legislation in compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability.

DGSE Deputy Director Jawad Afzal said in 1947 there were three centres for the rehabilitation of disabled persons in Pakistan. In 1980 there were 66 centres and in 2011 number of those centres

reached to 608.

Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons Deputy Director Zia Afzal Beg told Dawn that according to WHO estimates there are around 120,000 people in Islamabad who are disabled but only around 2,000 children are in contact with rehabilitation centres.

He said special cards were issued to persons with disabilities so that they can use them to receive benefits and relaxations but the process for acquiring these cards is so lengthy and difficult that majority of people do not have these cards.

Stalls were also put up as part of the event with 42 stalls put up to create awareness to participants about educational and rehabilitative equipment for persons with disabilities.

Report Launched

According to a report titled 'Moving from the margins' launched by the British Council on Wednesday there are various estimates of number of PWDs in Pakistan ranging from 3.3 million to 20 million.

If WHO average is applied there are 27 million PWDs in Pakistan which is more than the total population of Sweden, Austria and Switzerland combined.

The report recommended developing a comprehensive framework for the protection of rights and dignity of PWDs in all aspects of life, establishing a lead government department to develop and monitor the implementation of policies for PWDs.

It further recommended that effective use of resources be ensured in health, education and employment services.

The report said there was a need to build an environment that supports employment of persons with disabilities and persons with disabilities must be represented in Parliament.

It was launched at an event organised in collaboration with an NGO, 'Special Talent Exchange Programme'.

Member of National Assembly Maryam Aurangzeb from Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, speaking at the event, said the government should have been invited to participate in the compilation of the report. However, she said, after the 18th Amendment PWDs have become the responsibility of provinces.

"Accessibility for people with disabilities is a big issue. If facilities are not available for special persons in a building, it shows that they are not accepted there. Quality education should be ensured for PWDs," she said.

WHO stresses for legislation

A statement issued by WHO said that persons with disabilities make up the largest and most disadvantaged minority in the world.

WHO Technical Adviser Dr Maryam Mallick said that WHO in collaboration with Government of Pakistan and Disabled People Organisations (DPOs) has formulated the first comprehensive Disability Bill in line with the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

"In this regard provincial consultation meetings are being organised with the relevant provincial departments and with all the stakeholders. The bill is in the process of enactment at the federal and provincial levels," she said.



A SPECIAL child takes part in a competition at a funfair in F-9 Park on Wednesday. The other picture is of Neal Murata, press officer in the US embassy, speaking at the International Day of Persons with Disabilities on Wednesday. — White Star

