

Thursday, December 4, 2014

# International Day of Persons with Disabilities observed

## Staff Report

**ISLAMABAD:** Aurat Foundation, in collaboration with the Directorate General of Special Education, organized a policy dialogue, titled 'Road Map for Justice and Equality for Persons with Disability (PWD)' here on Wednesday, the International Day of Persons with Disability.

The event was supported by AUSDFAT, Trocaire and Women Learning Partnership (WLP). Speakers at the occasion spoke about the challenges faced by persons with disabilities and their social inclusion. They also talked about the need for improved awareness among stakeholders, services available for persons with disabilities and current status of legislation on disability. The said that there is no clear legislation at national level for the rights of persons with disabilities, and hence a strong and effective lobbying is required with relevant stakeholders.

The policy dialogue focused on challenges faced by disable community, inclusion process and challenges of establishing inclusion set ups and international and national commitments which have direct implications on person with disabilities. The event also featured musical performance by the TLC students. Ammara Anwar, Program Specialist, Pakistan Foundation Fighting Blindness, in her presentation focused on the challenges faced by disable community of

Pakistan. Major challenges faced by disable community include communication gap among NGOS working for PWDS, and the organizations working for human rights, insufficient quota allocation for persons with disabilities, and 18th amendment and its consequences.

Violent attitudes faced by PWDS in general and women with disabilities in particular, and lack of interest from both government and private sectors for the development of persons with disabilities is another issues. On the education front, lack of trained teachers and study mechanism specially for persons with mental disorders are the key challenges. Lack of implementation of quota available for PWDS in employment and other basic services and non-cooperative attitude of the colleagues is also discouraging.

Ammara recommended Directorate General of Special Education to hire at least 80 percent persons with disability in their departments and implementation of accessibility codes in all buildings in major cities. Saba I Mohsin, Early Intervention Consultant, discussed in detail the inclusion process and challenges of establishing inclusion set ups. The major challenges, she pointed out, was lack of coordination between ordinary schools and special schools, lack of awareness and education within the community, inadequate attention to disability-friendly infrastructure, lack of teachers'

training, resource materials and funds to develop the inclusive programs, and of course the attitudinal barriers of society including parents, educators and policy makers.

She stressed the need for sufficient financial resources, adequate support system including sufficient trained and qualified professionals, community participation, and on-going evaluation of established programs. Sradar Pirzada, Journalist, shared his experience of how he became a first blind journalist and after a certain point his disability becomes in his profession which he is when he took assistance PFFB and learn the computer assistive aids. "That was his second birth". He said three level of advocacy required one at state level, secondly by the civil society and thirdly by the disable people them. He further said these three tiers should work together for advocacy and awareness of disability. He highlighted the problems being faced by PWDs in which he said in accessibility is the most important and key factor which is creating hindrance for PWDs.

M Jawwad Afzal, Deputy Director, Directorate General of Special Education, in his presentation shared that out of total population of 180 million, there are 4 to 8 million persons with disabilities in Pakistan, and 45% of these are children under age 18. At least 3 million adults (both genders included) need rehabilitation through some kind of employment.