

**High Level Seminar on Disability and Poverty Reduction;
Including Disability into the Development Agenda**

“Asian Effort in Promoting Disability Movement”

Eita YASHIRO

Government of Japan, Member of Parliament

Honorable Chairperson of DPI/Asia-Pacific Region

Chairperson, Distinguished International Leaders on stage, Ladies and Gentlemen:

First of all, I want to express my sincere appreciation to the organizers who planned this significant seminar. My name is Eita Yashiro. I am a member of the House of Representatives of Japan.

It is my great pleasure to have an opportunity to participate in this seminar, as representatives of all my colleagues with disabilities in Asia Pacific region, and it is also my great honor to speak in this seminar. Thank you very much.

I would like to begin my speech using IYDP as my starting point since it created our foundation of disability movement in Asia Pacific Region. It is my hope that it will be helpful for the Inter American Development Bank and fellow colleagues who gather today to understand the history of the international disability movement.

In 1975, the United Nations passed a resolution called, “Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons”. Since many countries did not translate this Resolution into their own languages, people concerned with disability issues felt it was necessary to develop a more effective resolution. The United Nations then proceeded to pass another resolution, designating the year 1981 as “The United Nations Year of Disabled Persons” which created epoch-making waves globally. Worldwide disability movements became like large ocean waves resulting in a greater quality of life as they continued to develop.

The identity of persons with disabilities has changed drastically since that time; persons, who were totally dependent on others, such as medical doctors, nurses and family, etc.,

began to strive for independence, to live independently as much as possible. They realized that persons with disabilities can also make decisions concerning their personal matters even when attendant care is necessary.

People had gradually realized that disability in itself was not a problem, rather environmental barriers.

The disability movement developed with UN support. The IYDP motto of "Full Participation and Equality" of persons with disability had been disseminated gradually to the society. It is a welcome trend that issues of disability are now seriously considered in various fields of society with broad involvement of diverse groups of people. Many persons with disabilities were up front with various events. However, unfortunately, it is also true that much still remains to be done till we reached the goal. The global community was unable to change so quickly. It became apparent that it would require much work and persistence. It did result in the UN designating 1983-1992 as "the UN Decade of Disabled Persons". Much effort was invested to achieve its goals.

Evaluations conducted at the end of the decade showed evidence of much effort BUT less implementation. Especially, in Asia Pacific region including many developing countries, the implementation and results of the decade were not enough at all compared developed countries.

Before the end of the UN Decade of Disabled Persons, people who were concerned with disability issues in the Asia Pacific Region promoted the "Asia and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons" which was approved at the ESCAP General Assembly in Beijing, China. I, myself attended the Beijing Session. I still

vividly remember that I worked very hard with other participants, particularly with Mr. Deng Pufang, Chairperson in China Disabled Persons Federation, in mobilizing support for that historic resolution.

This decade was proposed by persons with disabilities like us, not by UN experts. We, persons with disabilities, have a responsibility to be active participants.

NGO network campaign activities were held in several countries to promote the Decade. The last campaign was held in Hanoi, Vietnam in December, 2001 where a resolution was accepted to set up another decade after the Asia and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons.

At ESCAP's 58th General Assembly held in Bangkok in 2001, it was resolved to declare a new decade.

Our new decade 2003-2012 in Asia Pacific region could be defined as a Decade of human rights. It is a Decade to eliminate all kinds of discrimination against people with disabilities in our region, and in the world.

I would like to point out once again, that many initiatives and efforts to begin the Asia Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons were made by people with disabilities themselves. This is the very important point. And also we have to note that those successful results were under the concerted efforts among NGO and UNECAP and each government body.

In 2002, we concluded Asia Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons in Japan in 2002, We agreed to discuss detail plans of action for the new decade from 2003. In order to proceed with this creative discussion, ESCAP held a high-level intergovernmental meeting in Otsu City, (by the greatest lake in Japan) Shiga Prefecture, Japan. Prior to the ESCAP meeting, there were two other major conferences, also in Japan. One was the DPI 6th World Congress, the other was the Rehabilitation International Asia-Pacific Regional Conference known as the "Osaka Forum" with the aim of identifying significant issues related to disability and making recommendations for the ESCAP meeting.

I would like to give a little background how DPI developed over the past 20 years. Rehabilitation International (RI) was formed primarily by professionals such as medical, educational, vocational and administrative experts who ignored persons with disabilities attending the 1980 RI World Congress in Winnipeg, Canada. The delegates with disabilities attending felt strongly that an international organization of persons with disabilities needed to be formed. After a preparation period of one year, DPI was established in Singapore in 1981.

DPI soon gained UN consultative status as an NGO and, raised its voice and participated in UN decision-making along with RI, the World Blind Union and the World Federation of the Deaf. Since UN agencies valued the input of NGOs, DPI participated as a consultant whenever UN agencies held meetings regarding disability issues. As a result, their policy implementation was definitely effective.

The movement of DPI, a world-wide NGO is based on regional strategy; Europe, North America, South America, Africa and the Asia-Pacific Regions have been developing their own movement to meet their regional needs.

I was elected as Chairperson of the Asia-Pacific Region for 15 years. Now I have become an Honorable Chairperson.

Now I would like to share about DPI's Asia and Pacific regional development. I am unable to mention all the details, but the Asia and Pacific Region of DPI has worked closely with ESCAP, just like two persons running with three legs. – Oh yes, we walk together.

DPI's motto, "A Voice of Our Own" recognizes that when small individual voices get together, they can create a large voice. Therefore, we have been working to develop national assemblies of cross-disability organizations in each country. The plan of operation is to identify persons with disabilities with leadership potential and give an opportunity to learn organizational and management skills, then provide support to empower them. When they have reached a satisfactory level of skills, DPI plans an international event in one of their countries. When DPI schedules their annual international conference, they also hold an international training seminar for persons with disabilities. In this case, DPI requests that the national and local governments as well as the economic sectors support them. This opportunity has proven to be effective in empowering persons with disabilities in organizational development, networking and collaboration.

The regional conference and international seminar held concurrently in a different country every year, are sponsored by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). DPI continues to recommend persons with disabilities from each country to go to Japan for a one month training course also sponsored by JICA. Some questions have been raised in terms of effective use of finances due to the cost of air fare, accommodations, etc. Since South to South strategy can be more effective, the Asia-Pacific Development Center on Disability is being established with the mission to empower persons with disabilities and promote a barrier-free society. It is expected to officially open this year in Bangkok, Thailand.

The Resolution passed at ESCAP's 58th General Assembly, Section 4-7, clearly welcomes this Center and at the same time is asking for the support and collaboration of Governments in Asia and the Pacific as well as NGOs.

The recent World Bank estimates suggest that disabled persons may account for as many as one in five of the world's poorest, that disability limits access to education and employment and leads to economic and social exclusion and that poor people with disabilities are caught in a vicious cycle of poverty and disability.

The disability movement has many challenges including poverty reduction of persons with disabilities which I have experienced in my work in the Asia-Pacific Region. I feel that the disability movement can effectively contribute to those challenges. National DPI organizations in this Region have been growing and empowering leaders with disabilities. I believe this movement will continue to develop.

However, in the 1990s, the Asia-Pacific Region was hit by a major economic crisis. Many persons with disabilities began to lose their jobs and funds for their organizations began to be cut off. Due to the lack of funds, meetings could not be held to address the economic crisis issues. When society is suffering from some great difficulties like economic crisis, negative effects first attack the most vulnerable groups of society, in particular those represented by the disabled.

Many organizations experienced financial crisis with no funds for transportation, communication, rent, etc. It became difficult to have international meetings. The economic crisis hit the most vulnerable part of society, in terms of disability and development.

The economic crisis has now begun to be overcome in many countries due to the efforts of the World Bank, IMF and Governments. From this experience, the issue of poverty reduction has become critical; we need to push forward and be committed to the disability issue.

As you know, today's seminar's title is "Disability and Poverty Reduction: Including Disability into the Development Agenda".

In 2002, I was invited for the Asian Development Bank seminar in Manila, Philippines to make key note speech at workshop called "Disability and Development" and I mentioned in my speech that all projects where citizens collaborated with NGOs had a much higher rate

of success which shows that collaboration with a community-based NGO is a basic necessity. Also I proposed ADB to redesign all projects to consider disability issues. For instance, ADB should stipulate that all buildings constructed with ADB loans need to be accessible for persons with disabilities, and all documents should be accessible for persons with visual impairments, etc. The all of policy should not be made by ADB only, but in consultation and collaboration with NGOs and community representatives. I strongly believe those are the key for success to create the barrier-free society.

I would like everyone to note that the strategy of the Banks' funds and their experiences are very similar to NGOs. I have often quoted the metaphor, "It is not good to pour rain on a jungle." If you do, only the top leaves are enriched with no drops reaching the bottom of the trees. The amount of aid and support are the same but in fact often only top Government sections and organizations have been enriched by the aid. NGOs have been playing the role of connecting the top and bottom. Therefore, I encourage all of you to cooperate and collaborate with the leaders of NGOs.

Regarding policy-making, it is based on data. However, some data conceals reality. So how can we read the data concerning poverty? According to the World Bank's estimation, 20 per cent of the world's poorest population is people with disabilities. Can we divide the poorest population into a 4 to 1 ratio? No. Perhaps the 4 out of 5 population are family members and/or community friends of persons with disabilities.

We are in the forth year of the 21st century. For us as persons with disabilities the 21st century begins now.

Finally, I would like to share my view with the colleagues with disabilities in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The challenge of the 21st Centry is to empower persons with disabilities who will promote a barrier freer society. 4 barriers that need to be addressed are the environment (architectural), information system, and legislation as well as human attitudes. Persons with disability are not only the light of the world to promote an inclusive, barrier free, right based society but also are peacemakers in this unsettled world. We people with disabilities have the tremendous potential for self empowerment. Let's create the world together, where all disabled people and non-disabled people live in harmony based on our human tights without any prejudice at all. Every human being has equal rights. Let's us

November 10, 2006

overcome the barriers ahead of us together, until we achieve the mutual goal for all of us, all of humankind. **Full participation and equal rights.** This process may require our patience, persistence and faith. I do believe in your commitment, and I will spare no efforts until our goal will be fulfilled in the near future.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Thank you very much.

---Oct.02.2002 Manila---