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CULTURAL EVENT FOR DISABLED PERSONS IN THE  
ESCWA REGION: AN EVENT TO MARK THE END OF THE UNITED NATIONS  
DECADE OF DISABLED PERSONS (1983-1992)  
IN THE ESCWA REGION  
17-18 OCTOBER 1992  
AMMAN

UN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION  
FOR WESTERN ASIA

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**DRAFT LONG-TERM STRATEGY TO FURTHER THE IMPLEMENTATION  
OF THE WORLD PROGRAMME OF ACTION CONCERNING DISABLED PERSONS  
TOWARDS THE YEAR 2001 IN THE ESCWA REGION <sup>1</sup>**

(Formulated by the plenary session of  
"Cultural Event for Disabled Persons in the ESCWA Region:  
An Event to Mark the End of the United Nations Decade  
of Disabled Persons (1983-1992) in the ESCWA Region",  
which took place from 17 to 18 October 1992, Amman)

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<sup>1</sup> This document is issued without formal editing and circulated to the participants of the Event for their comments in order to finalize the ESCWA Regional Long-Term Strategy to Further the Implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons towards the year 2001 in the ESCWA Region.



## I. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The validity of the World Programme of Action and its main components (prevention, rehabilitation and equalization of opportunities) is strongly reaffirmed.

Although many achievements were made in the ESCWA region during the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons (1983-1992), particularly in increasing public awareness of the capabilities and needs of disabled persons at the regional level, the main objectives of the Decade have not yet been fully attained. The majority of disabled persons in the ESCWA region have no access to appropriate medical services, rehabilitation, education, training, employment, shelter or technical aids/technologies. Therefore, a new ESCWA Decade of Disabled Persons (1993-2002) should be continued with a view to giving fresh impetus to further the implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons in the ESCWA region beyond 1992 and to achieving the goals of the Programme, particularly those concerning the full participation and equal opportunities of disabled persons. Rehabilitation of disabled Arab citizens (with particular emphasis of those who are victims of armed conflicts), and re-construction efforts of war-torn areas with full "accessibility" should be a major concern of this region. Activities related to this dimension will be implemented within the framework of the ESCWA resolution 182 (XVI) on Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Decade for Western Asia (1994-2003).

The guiding principle for the proposed new Decade should be "A society for all" -- a new, dynamic society which invests in efforts to accommodate all individual differences and strengthen development potential. The full integration of disabled persons in the ESCWA region should go beyond traditional efforts to assist them in adapting to the environment through rehabilitation; it should also lead to eliminating physical and social barriers and adapting the environment to meet their needs. Disabled persons' access to information should be guaranteed.

Community rehabilitation services should be promoted in the region, enhancing community-based support services for disabled persons and the extension of services to their families. This is one of the most effective solutions in helping disabled persons make the critical translation from being passive and dependent upon the community to being positive contributors to society and agents of their own destiny.

Disabled women in the Arab world face a double disability as their normal woman's role in society is greatly diminished. For many children, the presence of an impairment leads to resection and isolation. Disabled war victims and displaced persons with disability find difficulty for reintegration and resettlement in many communities. Mentally retarded persons, deaf persons without access to communication, those with multiple disabilities and those living in rural communities experience particular discrimination. Priority should be given to these disadvantaged groups of disabled persons.

One of the major achievements of the Decade in the ESCWA region has been the development of organizations of disabled persons and their empowerment, leading to self-determination. Efforts should be continued and strengthened to invite all nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the field of social development to: utilize their expertise to enhance the capabilities and activities of organizations of disabled persons; and to coordinate their activities.

In the ESCWA region, the Decade witnessed the beginning of positive changes in the region's ability to control causes of impairment. However, the incidence of disability is still on the increase due to rapid population growth (which will increase the absolute numbers of persons with disabilities), the aging of the population, worsening economic and social conditions in some parts of the region, and -- particularly -- wars and civil strife. Peace, security and political stability should be recognized as pre-requisites for solving the problem of disability.

## II. THE STRATEGY TO FURTHER THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WORLD PROGRAMME OF ACTION CONCERNING DISABLED PERSONS TOWARD THE YEAR 2000 AND BEYOND

### A. The purpose of the Strategy

The purpose of the Strategy is to increase the capacity of member states, United Nations organizations, governmental organizations, and NGOs to address adequately the issue of disability and to encourage them to develop strategic action plans and to establish permanent planning and monitoring mechanisms for further implementing the World Programme of Action.

### B. Concrete activities recommended on priority themes towards the year 2000 and beyond

#### Prevention of disability

(a) Governments, NGOs and concerned institutions in the region should initiate policies and plans to implement programme regarding prevention of and early intervention regarding disability, taking into account all the causes that lead to disability;

(b) Regional peace and security should be recognized as pre-requisites for prevention of disability;

(c) As a way of preventing childhood disability, there should be universal immunization programmes, nutritional programmes and pre-natal care;

(d) Systematic training programmes are needed for mothers, to teach principles of birth spacing and the ability to practice early intervention vise-a-vise childhood disabilities;

(e) The most significant cultural factor in the prevalence of severe disability in the region is the practice of kinship marriage in all communities and among all social classes. Special attention should be given to genetic testing and consultation before marriage.

### 2. Rehabilitation for all in need

(a) Training programmes should be developed for families of disabled persons in order to encourage positive attitudes towards disability and to help the family deal with disability in an appropriate manner. A training manual for parents covering rehabilitation of disabled children, adults and the elderly should be developed as an essential component of this programme;

(b) Opportunities for primary, secondary and higher education should be made available to disabled persons and "mainstreaming" of disabled persons should be promoted whenever possible;

(c) Governments should set up special education programmes. In this regard, there is a need to train sign-language interpreters for formal education and mass media. Also, provision of educational materials in Braille and audio-visual aids should be encouraged for visually-impaired persons;

(d) Training programmes for trainers should be implemented;

(e) Attention should be given to special-education programmes for mentally retarded persons, severely disabled children and those with multiple disabilities. Special education should also be introduced as a subject in regular teacher training programmes;

(f) Vocational-rehabilitation programmes are prerequisites for enabling disabled persons to exercise their rights with dignity. Governments should undertake studies on labour-market needs in order to adapt vocational training for disabled persons to those needs. Efforts at mainstreaming in the field of vocational training are also important.

### 3. Promoting and protecting human rights

(a) Governments should ratify and implement, if they have not yet done so, the International Covenants on Human Rights and other international legal instruments related to human rights and should pay due attention to the application of such instruments to the situation of disabled citizens;

(b) In circumstances characterized by extreme difficulties, the basic human rights of persons with disabilities, particularly disabled women and children, are at risk. In all programmes, disabled persons -- disabled women and children in particular -- should be given special attention in order to ensure that they receive their fair share of resources;

(c) Every effort should be made to include a specific component addressing the basic human needs and interests of disabled persons in all programmes in the community, including activities in the provision of food security, shelter and sanitation, education and employment, health and social services, transportation, family counseling and planning;

(d) A study should be undertaken in the occupied territories of Palestine to monitor events that might increase the incidence of disability or might violate the rights of persons with disability.

### 4. Developments of independent living

(a) In each country or community, organizations of disabled persons should conduct a study on the prerequisites of independent living in that community;

(b) Appropriate peer and community support must be available to facilitate the effective transition of a person with a disability from an institution into the community;

(c) It is clear that the integration of disabled persons in the community often requires the use of new and appropriate technologies or technical aids related to various aspects of disability;

(d) Institutions concerned should formulate programmes to train disabled women to perform various types of housework and to provide them with the necessary aids for that purpose.

#### 5. Promotion of community-based rehabilitation (CBR) programmes

(a) Services provided to disabled persons through centralized institutional activities do not always reach sufficient numbers of disabled persons, particularly in rural and remote areas. Community-based rehabilitation (CBR) is a desirable means of overcoming this problem. CBR should be promoted as advocated within the framework of the International Year of the Family;

(b) A major prerequisite for the development of CBR is the systematic assessment of existing community-development projects which can satisfy the needs of disabled persons, with the aim of selecting the most appropriate CBR approach for the particular social and cultural conditions of each country or community;

(c) World Health Organization (WHO) primary health care (PHC) programmes should be promoted in the ESCWA region, and components related to impairment/disability issues should be included;

(d) NGOs concerned with disabled persons should be given the necessary financial support, especially in view of the fact that the work of such organizations, which are active at the grass-roots levels, is of great importance in meeting the needs of disabled persons;

(e) CBR programmes should encourage the local production of low-cost technical aids and technologies for disabled persons, made from locally available resources.

#### 6. Enhancement of economic independence

(a) Everyone, including a disabled person, has a right to paid employment or self-employment. Appropriate vocational rehabilitation programmes should be provided to them in accordance with current labour-market needs;

(b) Employers' and workers' organizations are encouraged to adopt training policies that are in line with market requirements;

(c) Governments should adopt policies aimed at increasing employment opportunities for disabled persons, including disabled-employment-quota schemes, subsidies, cooperatives, tax reductions and other such incentives;

(d) Governments should also adopt social-security schemes which take into account the needs of disabled persons;

(e) In the countries of the region with few employment opportunities (such as labour-sending countries), the creation of self-employment schemes or cooperatives of disabled should be explored;

(f) Governments which have not yet ratified ILO Convention 159 are encouraged to do so. Their activities in this area should be based on the principles set out in that Convention.

## 7. Fully accessible society

(a) In city planning and in building and construction legislation, account should be taken of the conditions that facilitate the movement of disabled persons and ensure their safety. Such measures should include infrastructure services, transport and the entrances and interiors of buildings;

(b) Scientific research should be encouraged on the adaptation of the physical and social environment, and the results of such research should be disseminated in Arabic or in the most appropriate form to the media, decision makers and specialists, and disabled individuals, taking into consideration United Nations publications and international standards;

(c) It is very important to develop practical guidelines at the regional level for acquisition planning and procurement, by government agencies and private companies, to ensure the accessibility of disabled employees to electronic office equipment;

(d) The use of computers should be promoted to assist the integration of disabled persons into the community. The process may involve the adaptation of hardware to make it accessible to various categories of disabled persons and the development of appropriate software packages;

(e) It is extremely important that documentation be made available in an electronic format (e.g., ASCII format) suitable for computer-based outputs (e.g., synthesized-speech, Braille, large-print and tactile output);

(f) Advanced technologies developed in industrial countries should be adapted to meet local needs and transferred to the region through staff training;

(g) It is necessary to adapt the physical environment inside the home to the needs of disabled women, to give them the psychological and practical training to take care of their children and bring them up in a proper fashion;

(h) There is a need to develop a standardized Arabic sign language which is complementary to indigenous national sign languages.

## 8. Legislation, coordination and governing mechanisms as main instruments for improving the status of disabled persons

(a) The Standard Rules for Equalization of Opportunities for Disabled Persons should be adopted as a primary guideline for national policies in the field of disability;

(b) Governments should ratify and implement the International Covenants on Human Rights, the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons, the Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons, ILO Convention 159, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international instruments;

(c) At the national and the regional levels, disabled persons, both members of organizations and in their personal capacities, should participate in decision-making processes as equal partners. Appropriate legislation should be enacted to this end;

(d) Governments should systematically review existing national development policies and legislation with a view to promoting equalization of opportunities for disabled citizens;

(e) An important condition for the success of national rehabilitation services is effective coordination among various ministries, government agencies and NGOs. It is therefore recommended that national coordination or existing committees be strengthened so that they perform these tasks effectively. Governments should allocate special funds to support these national coordination committees;

(f) Disabled persons should be provided with the possibility of seeking counseling, legal advice and advocacy and a channel for appeal. Such services should be integrated into services available to the general public and should be provided in the language of choice.

#### 9. Promotion of public awareness of the capabilities and creativity of disabled Persons

(a) Although the new "Decade" is a decade for translating awareness into concrete action, awareness campaigns should be continued to heighten the profile of disability issues and to provide positive role models;

(b) The role of the mass media should be emphasized as a basic means of providing disabled persons with the information they need and of changing social attitudes with a view to their acceptance and integration into overall development plans and programmes;

(c) Due importance should be attached to: the training of media professionals to help them to assume their responsibilities toward disabled persons; the organization of training programmes and the teaching of disability issues in schools of mass communication and journalism;

(d) Intensive efforts should be made through the various media to spread awareness in the community and promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons and to correct negative ones. Sign language should be used in educational/public-television programmes;

(e) Appropriate attention should be devoted to the guidance of children, through information programmes aimed at promoting a spirit of cooperation and proper treatment of disabled persons from childhood;

(f) A regional centre should be established for studies and research on information and disabled persons, and a yearly prize should be awarded for the best media item dealing with the issue of disability and to information exchange -- programmes on disability among the countries of the region.

#### 10. Cooperatives efforts and new partnerships

(a) In view of the new conditions that are taking shape following the end of the cold war, there are new partners (e.g., private corporations) to address emerging issues of disability;

(b) Voluntary work in favor of disabled persons is an important component of public activities; however, it is still not properly developed in most countries of the ESCWA region. It is therefore recommended that the United Nations volunteer scheme and United Nations junior professional scheme intensify their activities in this region;



(c) ESCWA is requested to establish a separate focal unit on disability-related issues to coordinate regional activities in this field and to follow up the implementation of the recommendations of this Cultural Event for Disabled Persons and this Long-Term Strategy;

(d) The Regional Bureau of the Middle East Committee for the Affairs of the Blind has played an effective role in serving blind persons and promoting their welfare within and outside the region. However, these services have not been extended to any degree to other categories of disabled persons. It is encouraged to extend the basis of its activities to include other categories of disabled persons;

(e) In order to implement all recommendations, more intensive efforts should be made to obtain the necessary funds for problems of disability. ESCWA as the agency charged with the coordination of the regional activities of the United Nations agencies in the field of disability is requested to take the initiative in fund-raising in order to support its own activities as well as those of other United Nations agencies and NGOs.

### III. SELECTING SHORT/MEDIUM TERM PRIORITIES AND SETTING GOALS

While major changes in society are needed in order to reach a society for all, and as all recommendations cannot realistically be implemented simultaneously, a limited number of priorities for the short/medium term should be identified as well as the time-frame (e.g., the reduction by 25 per cent in the ESCWA region over the next five years of the causes of avoidable impairments which lead to disability).

### IV. MONITORING OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS AND FOLLOW-UP MECHANISMS

The implementation of the World Programme of Action and this Long-Term Regional Strategy should undergo a periodical monitoring exercise every five years. Such a monitoring at the local, regional and national levels must be based on close cooperation and understanding between organizations for disabled persons and all parties concerned. It is important that continuing efforts be made to foster a spirit of partnership in the interests of disabled persons and society as a whole. Also, among the United Nations agencies, the inter-agency mechanism (ESCWA task force) should be re-vitalized towards more frequent coordinating sessions on a project/programme basis.

### V. Concrete target-setting in the ESCWA region

The Event Cultural Event at the end of the Decade (1983-1992) expressed the need to review the above priority themes for further short/medium term concrete action, tied to targets within a specific time-frame, with particular emphasis on the following specific areas:

(a) Development of an ESCWA regional disability committee as a dynamic regional coordinating committee that includes parents of disabled children and disabled leaders (short-term);

(b) Revitalization of national rehabilitation committees and similar bodies at the national level, and encouraging them to include disabled leaders in order to influence national policies and practices (short-term);

(c) Continuation of regional and national public-awareness campaigns that project the positive images of disabled persons (medium-term);

- (d) Development of national prevention and early intervention programmes that are closely linked to primary health care systems (medium-term);
- (e) Development of national personnel training facilities with intra-regional exchange of students and instructors (medium-term);
- (f) Facilitation of the exchange of national information and experience, particularly through the regional coordination body composed of selected regional experts (short-term);
- (g) Development of model services such as community integration, CBR and income-generation schemes (medium-term);
- (h) Enactment of national legislation using international, regional guidelines with the funding to back it up (medium-term);
- (i) Mobilization of new (such as private enterprises) and existing regional and international financial and human resources for personnel preparation and services development and coordination. To this end, the Regional Bureau of the Middle East Committee for the Affairs of the Blind could expand its activities to include all categories of disabilities (short-term);
- (j) Setting up income-generation schemes that provide revolving loans/funds and other support (medium-term);
- (k) The use of community-based approaches over institutional approaches (medium-term);
- (l) Encouragement of employment promotion incentives in ESCWA Member States (medium-term);
- (m) Giving priority to regional expertise over external resource persons. When outside advice is required, caution should be applied in recruiting resource people (medium-term);
- (n) Giving priority to training and pooling of financial and human resources at the regional level (medium-term);
- (o) Giving ESCWA stronger support from its member countries for the continuation of its efforts in promoting regional activities related to disability prevention and rehabilitation (short-term).







