

Disabled People's Participation, Ensures Free and Fair Election

প্রতিবন্ধী নাগরিকের অংশগ্রহণ দুর্ভাগ্য ও অসুবিধা করে নির্বাচন

প্রতিবন্ধী নারীদের জাতীয় পরিষদ

জাতীয় তৃণমূল প্রতিবন্ধী ফোরাম

INTERNATIONAL DISABILITY DAY 3 DECEMBER 2006

৩ ডিসেম্বর ২০০৬ আন্তর্জাতিক প্রতিবন্ধী দিবস

গণতন্ত্র মানবাধিকার অংশগ্রহণ

এ্যাকশন অন (ডিজ) অ্যাবিলিটি এ্যাজ ডেভেলপমেন্ট- এডিডি



রাষ্ট্রপতি
পঞ্চমজাতীয় বাংলাদেশ
চলন
১৯ অক্টোবর ১৯১০
০৩ ডিসেম্বর ২০০৬

বাণী

বিশ্বের অন্যান্য দেশের নতো বাংলাদেশেও এবছর পঞ্চদশ "আন্তর্জাতিক প্রতিবন্ধী দিবস" পালিত হচ্ছে জেনে আমি অত্যন্ত আনন্দিত। তথ্য প্রযুক্তিতে প্রতিবন্ধী ব্যক্তিদের প্রবেশাধিকার এ বছরের প্রতিবন্ধী দিবসের প্রতিপাদ্য হিসেবে সমন্বয়যোগ্য হয়েছে।

প্রতিবন্ধীদের উন্নয়নের মূল স্রোতধারায় সম্পৃক্তকরণে বর্তমান অবাধ তথ্য প্রযুক্তিতে তাদের প্রবেশ নিশ্চিত করা অত্যন্ত গুরুত্বপূর্ণ। যথাযথ প্রশিক্ষণ ও তথ্য প্রযুক্তি জ্ঞানের মাধ্যমে প্রতিবন্ধীদের দক্ষ করে গড়ে তুলতে পারলে তারা জাতীয় উন্নয়নে অবদান রাখতে সক্ষম হবে। আমি আশা করি প্রতিবন্ধীদের জীবনমান উন্নয়নে সরকারি ও বেসরকারি প্রতিষ্ঠানের পাশাপাশি সমাজ হিতৈষণা এগিয়ে আসবে।

আমি আন্তর্জাতিক প্রতিবন্ধী দিবসের সকল কর্মসূচির সার্বিক সাফল্য কামনা করি।

আব্দুল হাফেজ, বাংলাদেশ জিন্দাবাদ।

প্রফেসর ড. ইয়াজউদ্দিন আহমেদ

INTERNATIONAL DISABILITY DAY
Disabled People's Participation
Ensures Free and Fair Election

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এ্যাকশন অন (ডিজ) অ্যাবিলিটি এ্যাজ ডেভেলপমেন্ট- এডিডি

INTERNATIONAL DISABILITY DAY Disabled People's Participation, Ensures Free and Fair Elections

75 lac voters are with disabilities in Bangladesh. For free and fair 9th National Parliamentary election, the citizens with disabilities demand:

- To introduce separate queue and groundfloor voting arrangements in the voting centers
- Arrange for permanent or temporary ramps in the polling centers
- Visually-challenged voters choose his/her own helper, or "tactile ballot" be introduced
- Incorporation of education, health and employment of the people with disabilities in the election manifestos of the political parties
- Raise awareness to create disability-friendly-voting environment by the public media.
- Every political party should nominate at least two candidates with disabilities from each division for a total number of 12 MPs in Parliament.

Let us be respectful towards the demands of the people with disabilities in order to ensure a free and fair election and to consolidate democracy in the country.

The United Nations Secretary -General's Message on the International Day of Disabled Persons 3 December 2006



The theme of this year's observance of the International Day of Disabled Persons, "E-accessibility", reminds us of the need to make the Internet available to everyone. Access to information and communication technologies creates opportunities for all people, perhaps none more so than persons with disabilities. And as the development of the Internet and these technologies takes their needs more fully into account, the barriers of prejudice, infrastructure and inaccessible formats need no longer stand in the way of participation.

This is a welcome change. As information and communications technologies spread across the world, drawing in more and more users every day, most websites remained inaccessible to the millions of people who have difficulty manipulating a mouse, or who are visually impaired and need a "screen reader" or large fonts to read the page. Slowly, governments and the private sector have been recognizing the economic and social benefits of making websites fully accessible, and have been putting place changes involving software and hardware alike. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which is expected to be approved by the General Assembly later this month, can give additional impetus to this trend. States that choose to become party to the Convention will thereby commit themselves to taking steps to provide "information intended for the general public to persons with disabilities in accessible formats and technologies appropriate to different kinds of disabilities in a timely manner and without additional cost". The Convention urges private businesses and mass media to do the same with their services. On this International Day, let us pledge again to do our utmost to achieve the vision of an inclusive, people-centred, development-oriented information society. And let us redouble our efforts to ensure that persons with disabilities can exercise their human rights and play their full part in the economic, social and political lives of their societies.

Former Prime Minister of the Peoples' Republic of Bangladesh
And
Chairperson, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)

MESSAGE

I extend warmest greetings to all my brothers and sisters with disabilities on the occasion of the International Disability Day. During our time, we have included education, health services and employment opportunities for people with disabilities in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, to have a lasting change in the socio-economic condition of their lives. We have initiated micro-credit for their income generation and introduced allowance for the poor disabled people. All these initiatives contributed to a positive change in the lives of people with disabilities and their families. We have introduced 1% quota for the people with disabilities in the Bangladesh Civil Service and 10% quota for all other government services. All these steps were taken to bring them in the mainstream development. We have taken these programs for their development and ensuring their interests, not only because they are the members of the society but also they are our relatives, friends, brothers, sisters and children. I call upon all the citizens of the country to extend their helping hands for the people with disabilities.

Allah Hafez, Bangladesh Zindabad
(Begum Khaleda Zia)

Former Chief Justice and
First Chief Adviser of the
first Caretaker Government
of Bangladesh.

MESSAGE

I wish to extend my support and solidarity on the occasion of the International Disability Day to the efforts of Action on Disability and Development (ADD), the National Council of Disabled Women and National Grassroots Disability Organization who are working to protect the rights of disabled people in 27 districts of Bangladesh. In Bangladesh around one crore forty lacs people are disabled of whom 43% are hard core poor. Only 4% of the disabled children have access to education. They are largely deprived of basic human needs, rehabilitation and employment opportunities. Development can take place only if we can abolish existing discrimination against the persons with disabilities. In 2001 the Government of Bangladesh passed the Disability Welfare Act (2001) which requires amendment to protect the rights of the disabled people. UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is going to be enacted soon. To fulfill the noble aims of the Convention, the state, government, development institutions, corporate sector and civil society must all work together. I wish the observance of International Disability Day all success. I send my fondest greetings to all our citizens who are disabled.

(Mohammed Habibur Rahman)

Disability Scenario in Bangladesh

- Amongst 14 millions disabled people around 50% are hardcore poor
- 1.5 million people are severely disabled -have no working ability and living in worst condition.
- 96% children with disabilities do not have access to primary education
- 72% parents face difficulties enrolling their children in education institutions
- Education of disabled children is under Ministry of Social Welfare, not under Ministry of Education
- Of 3.4 million eligible disabled children, only 1700 are currently enrolled in special needs schools
- Crude mortality rate is double among disabled children, it was 14% in rural areas in 2001
- Disabled people do not have access to Microcredit !!

The theme of the International Disability Day 2006 is 'e-accessibility.' The world becomes a global village due to the wide uses of internet and satellite channels. However, most of the persons with disabilities are deprived of these opportunities. The declaration for ensuring computer facilities for every child by 2010 has no value to the challenged people while their access to the basic rights like education and health services are a daily struggle. Nevertheless, we should make concerted efforts to improve services for computer training and to develop accessible software and hardware for the challenged people.

Former Prime Minister
And
President, Bangladesh Awami League

MESSAGE

It is December 3 which is International Disability Day. The day is observed in a befitting manner throughout the world as well as given in due importance to observe the day in Bangladesh. I express my warmest felicitations and wishes to all the people with disabilities in Bangladesh. People with disabilities are our valuable human resource. They are also the citizens of the country as well. Without neglecting them, it is the responsibility of the society to provide treatment, education and training to ensure their rehabilitation, welfare and rights. They should get equal opportunities so that they can become self-reliant, participate in all activities of the society and contribute in nation building. During the tenure of the Awami League government, a trust was created for the welfare for the people with disabilities. They were given identity cards for their easy movement and provided with special training in sports. During this time they took part in the World Para-Olympics and brought rare glory for the country. By implementing these steps properly, people with disabilities can live with dignity. I urge the privileged members of the society and institutions to come forward for their rehabilitation and ensuring overall well-being. May all the people and children with disabilities of the world live in the society with respect and dignity. I wish that the lives of people with disabilities would be meaningful by the cooperation of all of us. Khoda Hafiz Joy Bangla. Joy Bangabondhu Long live Bangladesh (Sheikh Hasina)

In support of International Day of Disabled Persons (for Action on Disability and Development)



I am delighted to lend my personal support, and that of the British High Commission, to International Disability Day and the efforts of ADD, the National Council of Disabled Women and National Grassroots Disability Organization. We firmly believe in supporting the fulfillment of human rights by all. In Bangladesh, this means working for the inclusion and development of all marginalised groups in society. Preparations for the forthcoming elections are no exception. All eligible Bangladeshis deserve the right to vote, and the legitimacy of the next government requires the fullest possible participation. We urge the parties and those responsible for preparing the ground for the elections to ensure that minority groups, including those with disabilities, are not excluded from fulfilling their democratic rights, now and the future.

Anwar Chowdhury
The British High Commissioner

Democracy, Human Rights, Participation

Action on Disability and Development (ADD) is a UK based international organization working in Bangladesh since 1995 to promote the rights of disabled people. ADD has a vision of "a world where all disabled people are able to enjoy their rights, fulfill their responsibilities and obligations and participate as fully as they choose at every level of society." Presently, ADD is working in 27 districts in Bangladesh building the capacity of thousands of people with disabilities and influencing policies and practices that affect their lives. International Disability Day is observed across the globe on 3rd December every year. ADD Bangladesh, along with its partners, are committed to observe the day with a view to creating awareness on the needs and rights of citizens with disabilities and improving their dignity and security. The theme of this year's International Disability Day is "e-accessibility". Unfortunately, citizens with disabilities in Bangladesh are far from being ensured of their access to the internet. The burning issue currently facing the nation is the parliament elections to be held in January 2007. The right to exercise their franchise must be ensured for citizens with disabilities. They must be included in the election process to consolidate democracy in Bangladesh. About 75 lac citizens with disabilities are voters in Bangladesh. However, neither the political parties nor the electoral institutions are showing much concern about the participation of citizens with



Mosharraf Hossain
Country Representative

disabilities in political activities and decision-making process. Absence of enabling environment often marginalized and excluded them from exercising voting rights. Without participation of citizens with disabilities in the electoral process, we cannot expect a free and fair election, which is the precondition for institutionalizing democracy. The disability movement will observe the International Disability Day in Bangladesh with an emphasis on "Democracy, Human Rights and Participation" to promote political rights and ensure participation of 7.5 million voters with disabilities with a view to having a free and fair upcoming polls. The slogan of the day is: "Disabled people's participation ensures free and fair election." The spirit of international disability day will mobilize the citizens with disabilities, the government, political parties, civil society and the media to promote their political rights for a free and fair parliament election. The objectives of the day are: to create awareness in the society of the struggle and achievements of citizens with disabilities, to sensitize the state machinery, especially the Election Commission to ensure equitable access of citizen with disabilities to the electoral process for a free and fair election; and to influence political parties to include education, health, employment and equal opportunities for citizens with disabilities in their election manifestos and also nominate disabled people as candidates to ensure their participation in the decision making process. A day-long program has been undertaken to observe the day both at local and national level. Over 20 thousand people will take part in the campaign to promote their political rights to strengthen democracy in the country from the grassroots to the national level. The citizen with disabilities in this campaign meet ex-members of parliaments, potential candidates of political parties, mobilize civil society and media and conduct human chain, rallies, discussion meetings, cultural programme to observe the day.

International Day of Disabled Persons, 3rd December 2006



I am delighted to lend my voice to the messages of goodwill to mark the International Day of Disabled Persons 2006. The European Union is committed to advancing the rights of disabled persons through the progressive framing of international obligations, policy engagement and development co-operation. For example, the EU's Charter on Fundamental Rights prohibits discrimination on the grounds of disability and the EU is working to advance disability rights at the international level through negotiations on a dedicated UN Convention. I applaud the timely focus on elections of International Disability Day in Bangladesh - democracy, human rights and participation - not least as these are areas on which the European Commission's civic awareness programme is very much focused. I am also pleased to inform you that the EC will continue its policy of supporting projects that directly address the needs and rights of disabled people with two new projects due to start on 1 January 2007. One of them, 'Disabled people's rights and inclusion - Strengthening Disabled Peoples Organisations and Beyond', is to be implemented by Action on Disability and Development. The other, 'Proximity services for a full participation of people with disabilities in all spheres of life', will be implemented by Handicap International France. May I extend every good wish to all the individuals and organisations engaged on making International Disability Day a success in Bangladesh. Dr Stefan Frowein
Ambassador and Head of Delegation for the Delegation of the European Commission to Bangladesh

The issues of people with disabilities must be reflected in the political manifestos



The 14 million people with disabilities in the country can play a crucial role in the process of nation building. Obviously overall development of the country cannot be achieved without their participation. However, there is no mention of the different needs of the people with disabilities in the manifestos of the different political parties of the country. The total number of voters with disabilities is 7.5 million. Their participation in political arena is limited. They even have to face difficulties in exercising their voting rights. Without creating a friendly atmosphere for these millions of voters with disabilities democracy cannot be meaningful. Our demand to the political parties is that the issues of people with disabilities must be included in their election manifestos

Rights of People with Disabilities Hopes and heart-breaks

How much of the hopes and aspirations of the people of disabilities have been achieved? 10% population of the country should enjoy economic, social, cultural, civil & political rights. The Disability Welfare Act 2001 should be amended to promote and protect their rights. Disability is included in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). What is now essentially required is to allocate resources in the budget to implement the action plan of PRSP. People with disabilities do not have access to the Bangladesh Civil Services. The government declared 1% quota for them in the BCS, which is indeed a praiseworthy step. This generated a great deal of enthusiasm among the people with disabilities all over the country. It is still uncertain when this quota will actually be implemented.

Bank Note for the visually challenged people:

The Bangladesh Bank has introduced dots on the notes of Taka 20, 50, 100 and 500 considering the needs of visually challenged persons. The dots are endorsed on the rights sides of these notes: one dot for Taka 20, two dots for 50, three dots for 100 and four dots for Taka 500. The visually challenged persons can identify the value of the new notes but they face problem to mark the notes that are used for some time. Driving license for disabled people: Bangladesh Road and Transport Authorities (BRTA) issued driving license to Mosharraf Hossain on 21 March 2006 after proper driving tests. Dr. Abdul Momen, the ex-Chairman of BRTA took this initiative and created the first example of issuing a driving license to a person with disabilities in Bangladesh. "The citizens with disabilities have the same voting rights as other citizens. It needs to arrange separate polling booths and introduce different ballots for the visually challenged people." Kim McQuay, Country Representative, The Asia Foundation

Experience of Election Observation:



Umme Kusun Ranjana, Chairperson, National Council of Challenged Women. During the observation of the last national parliament elections it was noticed that the people with disabilities are ignored. The wheel-chair users and other disabled citizens including crutch users did not get priority in exercising their franchise and faced difficulties. Attempts were made by certain influential candidates to coerce some voters with money to vote in their favour. The visually-impaired people were prevented from entering the centers and they were told not to cast their votes and ask their acquaintances to vote for them. In some isolated cases even the helpers of the visually-impaired people were not allowed to vote and the presiding officers themselves cast the votes on their behalf. The 9th General Election is going to be held soon. So our demand to the government, political parties and others concerned is that the issues of the people with disabilities are taken into account and ensure their participation in the election process, which will strengthen democracy.