

Committee on Social Development

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Statement (Agenda No.5)

Mr. Chair/Madam Chair
Excellencies
Distinguished delegates
Ladies & Gentlemen

India is one of the oldest civilizations in the world with wide diversity and rich cultural heritage. It has achieved all-round socio-economic progress during the last 75 years of its Independence. The social fabric of the society is not uniform across the country; it varies from state to state and even in many States it varies from region to region. We stand by the principle of unity in diversity and committed to the goal of inclusive development covering all segments of society including persons with disabilities.

2. The Indian Constitution guarantees freedom, justice and equality of all individuals, laying the foundation for an inclusive society. In particular, the States and Governments are mandated to make effective provisions for securing the right to work, to education and to public assistance, *inter alia*, in case of sickness and disablement.

3. Persons with Disabilities like all other citizens, have immense potential, which needs to be nurtured. They can excel in any field be it in education, sports, literature, arts provided accessible and conducive environment is created for them. Some of them have already been displaying extraordinary qualities and talent. Keeping this in view, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India has coined the term 'Divyangjan' which means 'Persons with Special Abilities'. Usage of this term will not only help in sensitizing and changing the mindset of people in general but will also enable persons with disabilities improve their self-esteem and work positively towards improving their knowledge and skills. Under his leadership the issues related to Divyangjans have been put at the forefront of Government initiatives.

4. India has always displayed strong commitment to the principles of the United Nations, and it was among the first countries to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). India was the first country to ratify the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Print Disabled.

5. India has taken a significant step towards meeting its obligations under the UNCRPD; and has enacted the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, which came into force from 19.04.2017. This Act broadens the rights and entitlements of persons with disabilities, which inter-alia include non-discrimination, protection from abuse, violence and exploitation, community life, legal capacity, access to justice, etc. It also provides reservation of not less than 4% in Government jobs and reservation

of not less than 5% in seats in Government/Government aided higher educational institutions for persons with disabilities. The Central Government recently has also extended the benefit of reservation in promotion in Central Government establishments. The Act lays thrust on ensuring accessibility in public buildings (both Government and private), transportation system and ICT eco system in a prescribed time-frame. It also focuses on promoting education, health, social security of persons with disabilities besides facilitating their participation in sports and cultural activities.

6. As per the last Census of 2011, there are about 27 million of persons with disabilities in the country and the number is likely to go up when we have the next Census data taking into account the new categories of disabilities covered under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016.

7. The Government launched the 'Unique Disability ID(UDID)' project with a view to create a national data base of persons with disabilities and to issue Unique Disability Identity Cards in the year 2016-17. The project also provides an online platform for certification of persons with disabilities. The database is dynamic and ensure non-duplication of data relating to persons with disabilities. So far more than 8 million Unique Disability ID Cards out of 27 million PwDs have been generated through this portal. The database will help the Government in implementing various Government programme and facilities meant for persons with disabilities in an effective and transparent manner. The database

will help in bridging the gaps in maintaining the disability segregated data in various sectors in the near future.

8. Hon'ble Prime Minister of India launched the Accessible India Campaign on 3rd December 2015 to promote accessibility in three verticals, i.e. physical infrastructure, transportation and ICT ecosystem. The Government is moving towards systematically infusing universal accessibility in the structure of the Indian society, physical, digital and social.

9. The Government has already notified the Harmonised Guidelines and space standards for creating barrier free environment for persons with disabilities and elderly in public buildings, code of Practice for Bus Body Design for Buses and the Guidelines for Indian Government Websites 2016 for Government Websites.

10. With the vision of further expanding the coverage of accessibility standardization, the Government started the initiative of formulation of Sector-Specific Accessibility Standards/Guidelines. We are making steady progress in making our public infrastructure accessible. All 35 International airports in India have been made accessible and all 709 major railway stations have been provided with accessible facilities.

11. On 2nd March 2021, the Government launched a user friendly and accessible Suganya Bharat App - a Crowdsourcing Mobile Application to enable anyone, anywhere, anytime to bring to notice accessibility-related issues being faced by them while using public

centric infrastructure, facilities and services which require redressal.

12. We understand that poverty and disability are closely linked, and PwDs are more vulnerable towards socio-economic barriers to development. I am happy to share that India is one of the fastest growing economies in the world. In the last two decades or so, it has lifted millions and millions of people above the poverty line, and in the process created a huge middle class population. Reduction in the hardships faced by persons with disabilities is the natural outcome of this process of economic development. This process has been supplemented by targeted schemes and programmes, and affirmative action, in favour of persons with disabilities.

13. Under Deendayal Divyangjan Rehabilitation Scheme (DDRS) financial assistance is provided to NGOs for providing education, vocational training and rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities. Under this programme since 2014-15, about 0.3 million persons with disabilities have been benefitted.

14. Under the Scheme of Assistance to Disabled Persons for Purchase / Fitting of Aids/ Appliances (ADIP), is provided grant-in-aid to various implementing agencies for purchase/fitting of aids & assistive devices for the physical rehabilitation of PwDs. Since 2014-15, 12610 camps were organized, wherein aids and appliances worth 181.6 million USD have been distributed benefitting 2.3 million persons with disabilities across the country. During this period, 4494 cochlear implant surgeries have also been supported.

15. India is also currently formulating its sector-specific 25 Year Vision Document, which will be co-terminus with 100th year of independence with a view to achieve universal inclusion and empowerment. The consistent efforts towards inclusion speaks about the larger government priority of collective efforts and inclusive growth, wherein persons with disabilities are and will continue to be an integral part.

16. Care and consideration for the sick, elderly and persons with disabilities has always been a part of Indian culture and tradition. Government of India is implementing various health programmes to address the health concerns of citizens including persons with disabilities. It implements the Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram for early detection of 4 D's (birth defects, diseases, deficiencies and development delay including disability) so as to ensure appropriate interventions at the earliest opportunities to minimize disability burden. Recently, the Government has setup 14 Cross Disability Early Intervention Centres at 7 National Institutes and 7 Composite Regional Centres. These Cross Disability Early Intervention Centres are equipped to provide facilities of screening of children in the age group of 0-6 years, early rehabilitation therapeutic services such as occupational therapy, physiotherapy, speech therapy, peer and parental counselling and school readiness facilities.

17. During COVID 19 pandemic additional measures were put in place by the Government for ensuring safety and well-being of persons with disabilities. Persons with Disabilities are given priority in COVID 19 Vaccination. Besides, PwDs and their caregivers given

preference for vaccination at places nearer to their home. The Government also launched a dedicated 24x7 toll free Mental Health Rehabilitation helpline (18005990019) service 'KIRAN' from 7th September, 2020 which is available in 13 languages. The Government also provided additional 5 kg of ration per person to about 810 million beneficiaries covered under the National Food Security Act to ameliorate hardships faced by the poor during COVID 19 lockdown until November, 2021.

18. We have a strong mechanism of monitoring implementation of the provisions of the RPwD Act and the schemes and programmes meant for persons with disabilities through Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities and State Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities at the Central and State level respectively.

19. We have come a long way in creating conducive environment for inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities. However, we acknowledge the challenges ahead. We are open to regional and multilateral cooperation for mobilising resources and improving technology interventions towards empowerment of the marginalised sections of the society including persons with disabilities to achieve the objective of 'No one is left behind'.

Thank you!

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