

Promoting Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities

Multi-stakeholder workshop, 21 November 2017, Yangon

Welcoming Remarks by Rory Mungoven, ILO Liaison Officer

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to this multi-stakeholder workshop on promoting employment of people with disabilities.

I would like to sincerely thank the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement for its support to this event and acknowledge the leadership role it has played in advancing the disability agenda here in Myanmar. I would also like to thank the Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business and its staff for the excellent partnership in putting together today's event.

Myanmar made an important commitment to promote and protect the rights of disabled persons when it ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability in 2011. In June 2015 this was translated into a landmark new national law on disability that included important provisions on employment opportunities for persons with disability.

The 2014 national census indicated about 5 per cent of Myanmar's population is living with some form of disability. The more specific Labour Force Survey conducted by the Ministry of Labour in 2015 indicated 7.7 per cent. But what is also apparent is the degree to which persons with disability fall behind in other key indicators, such as literacy rates, school attendance at primary and secondary level, education completion rates and labour force participation rates.

So action to advance the rights of disabled persons needs to be an integral part of any vision for inclusive and sustainable development in this country, one that "leaves no one behind". For this reason disability is very much woven into the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 8 on creating decent work opportunities and access to the labour market for persons with disability, and Goal 10 emphasising the social, economic and political inclusion of persons with disability.

For its part, ILO and its partners in Myanmar have included a special focus on disability in our future work on job creation and social protection in our new four year Decent Work Country Program.

Achieving equality for persons with disability does not just mean treating them equally. Sometimes overcoming entrenched forms of discrimination, stigma and inequality requires affirmative action or positive measures that lift a particular group out of its disadvantaged situation, that break down barriers and create a more level playing field. It means breaking stereotypes and conventional attitudes to recognize disabled people for their abilities and potential in every sphere, to empower them as rights holders and agents of their own destiny, rather than objects of sympathy and charity.

Obviously we should set our sights and ambitions high. But it is also important to be realistic and practical about what will work best in the Myanmar context, to learn lessons from other countries, and to ensure the maximum possible buy-in among all the relevant stakeholders to achieve the best possible results.

This requires social dialogue and partnership between different parts of Government, the private sector, the trade union movement and above all disabled persons themselves, as we have represented here in the room today. Over the past few years, ILO has developed a global network of businesses who have come to recognize the business benefits of employing persons with disability and we hope that we can contribute to such positive and progressive thinking here in Myanmar.

As State Counsellor said in November last year: “We are required to make disabled persons believe that they have equal rights like other people in our society and to make them enjoy these rights, hand in hand with each other. We have cutting edge technology in the world, and we have acquired opportunities to help them become strong, healthy and able. But the most important is respect. Every individual has the right to deserve respect.”

So let us begin our discussion today in that spirit of respect, and find new strategies to work together to advance the rights of persons with disability, particularly to decent work and employment opportunities, and achieve inclusive and sustainable development for all the people of Myanmar.

Thank you.