

Our Rights - issue 19, February 2010



The International Disability and Human Rights Network

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or email us at info@daa.org.uk with your news stories.

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Convention

- **Sign ups**
- 144 signatories to the Convention
- 88 signatories to the Optional Protocol
- 78 ratifications of the Convention
- 48 ratifications of the Optional Protocol

- **Mauritius and Zambia ratify UN Convention**

On 8 January 2010 Mauritius became the 77th country to ratify the UN Convention. About three weeks later (February 1st) Zambia followed suit.

<http://www.un.org/disabilities/>

- **India's Disability Act not implemented, not reviewed and not in line with UN Convention**

Disability activists and NGOs have criticized the Indian government for failing to keep its promise to amend the country's Disability Act to make it more effective, as well as to comply with the UN Convention.

"Having signed and ratified the Convention, India has an obligation to orient its laws towards it," said Kanchan Pamnani, a solicitor who has been working closely with the Disability Rights Group.

Javed Abidi, Convenor of Disability Rights Group and Chairman of National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled Persons (NCPEDP) had asked the government to replace the Act with new legislation - "The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Respect for Dignity, Effective Participation and Inclusive Opportunities) Act." But, the government apparently refused this request and is pushing ahead with only modest amendments to the existing law. It does not intend to consult on these changes.

<http://www.deccanherald.com/content/45178/proposed-amendments-disability-act-upsets.html>

It has also been noted that the current Disability Act has not been reviewed for 15 years and has not been implemented. G Jayaram, Director, Disabled and Senior Citizens Department in Bangalore, said, the State government has not effectively implemented the norms of the disability act in the State. “Ignorance from other department exists as there has been no committee formed to monitor the implementation of this act,” Retired Justice M N Venkatachalaiah, former chief justice and chairman of the National Human Rights Commission said, “Official apathy and failure of the Government in ensuring basic human rights to persons with disability is a critical issue in the society today.”

<http://www.deccanherald.com/content/47569/disability-act-crippled-lack-implementation.html>

<http://www.deccanherald.com/content/46525/govt-takes-14-yrs-first.html>

- **Indian NGOs fear official report on implementing Convention could be a whitewash**

Some Indian NGOs have raised serious questions about how the country’s UNCRPD implementation report is being put together.

An activist from Karnataka said, “If we raise questions we are brushed aside as troublemakers.” He pointed out that there had been no independent verification of the claims made by state disability commissioners.

Indhumadhi Rao, Regional Advisor for CBR (Community-Based Rehabilitation) Network for SAARC, said that although the state of Karnataka reported 5,828 disabled rehabilitation workers had been appointed, there was little evidence of this on the ground. Furthermore, she claimed that the numbers they claim to have benefited from their programmes are far in excess of the number of disabled persons in the state.

<http://www.deccanherald.com/content/44569/ngos-fear-indias-report->

- **Survey reports on conditions facing disabled women in Europe in light of UN Convention**

The European Union has just released a detailed study which analyses and interprets information on the situation of disabled women in 33 European countries in light of the UN Convention. The work also specifies what still has to be improved to allow these women to enjoy their rights and fundamental freedoms.

All key areas are investigated including; legislation, employment, education, independent living, access to social and health services, standard of living, access to goods and services, access to justice, participation in political, public and cultural life.

Not surprisingly, the report finds disabled women suffer disadvantage and discrimination in all aspects of life. It recommends, among other things, that policies are made more sensitive to the gender dimension of disability and that Member States develop national strategies for disabled women addressing the range of issues covered in the UN Convention.

The report can be downloaded at:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=4364&langId=en>.

UK

- **Hate crime against disabled people in Wales exposed in BBC documentary**

In Wales in 2009, police recorded 116 hate crimes against disabled people. There were only 18 convictions.

A recent documentary, 'Why do you hate me?' for BBC One Wales suggests many more incidents go unrecorded. The programme, is presented by Simon Green, a wheelchair user from Bridgend, who secretly filmed a couple of his nights out to expose the hostility and abuse he sometimes experiences.

The Director of Public Prosecutions, Kier Starmer QC, admitted that the justice system did not always get it right when dealing with disability hate crime. He said: "I think there are lots and lots of

incidents of disability hate crime...we haven't collectively picked them up and investigated and prosecuted them in the way we should."

In one incident highlighted in the programme, a 77-year-old disabled woman and her daughter tell Green that they had called police 60 times in the last five years, but only the latest incident – their car being vandalized - had been categorised as a hate crime.

Chief Supt Paul Symes, for Gwent Police, said, "I will do my utmost to ensure that this is not a Pilkington case for Gwent Police. I'm aware of what the learning was within Pilkington, part of that involved some criticism around some perception that agencies weren't working together."

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/8437523.stm>

A report on disability hate crime in Wales can be found in the August edition of our newsletter

Reports on case of Fiona and Francesca Pilkington can be found on our website:

<http://www.daa.org.uk/index.php?mact=Blogs,cntnt01,showentry,0&cntnt01entryid=57&cntnt01returnid=98>

<http://www.daa.org.uk/index.php?mact=Blogs,cntnt01,showentry,0&cntnt01entryid=66&cntnt01returnid=98>

<http://www.daa.org.uk/index.php?mact=Blogs,cntnt01,showentry,0&cntnt01entryid=64&cntnt01returnid=98>

A conference on disability hate crime held in October 2009 in Kent can be seen on You Tube:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eiLgXmkfHdo>

- **Mother jailed for murdering disabled son**

Frances Inglis was jailed for life, with a minimum term of nine years, after being found guilty of murder for giving a lethal injection of heroin to her brain-damaged 22-year-old son Thomas.

Despite her claim that she wanted to put her son out of his misery, the judge told the jury that no one had the right to take the law into their own hands.

Although doctors had told her that Tom had a good chance of making a recovery, Mrs. Inglis refused to believe them. In 2007 she had tried to kill him, but had been stopped. Her second attempt in November 2008 succeeded.

Cries of "shame on you" were directed at the jury from the public gallery as the verdicts were read out.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/mercy-killing-mother-is-jailed-for-life-1873767.html>

<http://disabilitymatters.blogspot.com/search/label/Frances%20Inglis>

- **Mother cleared after helping disabled daughter to commit suicide**

At her disabled daughter's request, Kay Gilderdale gave Lynn (31) a cocktail of lethal drugs. Lynn had had severe ME since she was 14. The jury took less than two hours to return a verdict of not guilty.

The judge criticised Crown Prosecution Service for pursuing a case of attempted murder and praised the jury. He said to Mrs. Gilderdale, "There is no dispute that you were a caring and loving mother and that you considered that you were acting in the best interests of your daughter."

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/jan/25/mercy-killing-kay-gilderdale-cleared>

- **Scottish MP proposes 'assisted dying' law**

Margo MacDonald, an independent member of the Scottish Parliament and long-time supporter of euthanasia, has said that about 50 people a year might use her assisted dying law.

Under her proposals, which she has made on a number of previous occasions, the groups eligible to ask for assistance would be people with a terminal illness and people suffering from a long-term progressive, degenerative condition, such as multiple sclerosis or Parkinson's, who feel their life has become intolerable. Ms MacDonald has Parkinson's.

<http://edinburghnews.scotsman.com/news/Margo-says-50-Scots-a.6001169.jp>

Editorial comment: Although very different, these two cases and MacDonald's proposal, have given more oxygen to the unseemly debate about when it is alright to murder disabled and elderly people and increased the pressure to change the law on assisted suicide.

There has not been universal support for what Frances Inglis did, but much of the mainstream media has questioned the decisions of the judge and jury. For example, the Daily Express(1) ran a comment entitled, "Mercy Killing isn't murder" and called for the Lord Chief Justice to put right, '...this cruel example of blind justice.' At the other end of the political spectrum, the Mirror called Frances Inglis, "Mother Courage"(2). The Guardian was more equivocal, saying her conviction was correct under the law, but that the law needs to be changed.(3) Alasdair Palmer's comment in The Daily Telegraph (6) stands out for at least understanding the issues at stake. He writes: "...the law cannot license the killing of people by relatives or friends simply because they think their sick relatives will be better off dead. That is murder by any standard, and no decent society can permit murder or allow it to go unpunished."

However, Palmer's view gives no reason to sleep too comfortably in you bed tonight. It is very much a minority view and press support for Gilderdale has been overwhelming. Phil Friend, writing in the Times (7), has argued, '...like Lynn Gilderdale many other profoundly disabled people are utterly dependent upon others. They are often placed in situations where other people have a great deal of power and influence over them, and a lot of unsupervised access. To exempt individuals from legal scrutiny if they assist the person in their care to commit suicide would leave already vulnerable people at greater risk.'

It is important above everything to ask why disabled and elderly people have to endure such pressure and such questions about the most basic of all human rights, the right to life?

1. <http://www.express.co.uk/ourcomments/view/153820/Mercy-killing-isn-t-murder>
2. <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/columnists/phillips/2010/01/23/don-t-punish-this-mother-courage-115875-21988352/>
3. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/jan/21/life-sentence-makes-no-sense>

4. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree>
5. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/jan/25/criminal-justice-edlington-francis-inglis>
6. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/7062741/A-mercy-killing-without-consent-is-nothing-but-murder.html>
7. http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/industry_sector/public_sector/article7015671.ece

- **Funding for disabled students in England delayed**

Two-thirds of disabled students (about 12,500) in England are still (Feb. 2010 – four months after term started) waiting for money to pay for specialist equipment and personal assistance, as well as grants or loans for university fees. This is shown in statistics from the Student Loans Company (SLC). According to an official report (December 2009), the organisation's overall performance has been characterised by "conspicuous failures".

Tens of thousands of students had to begin the academic year without their full loan and grant entitlement after problems with the processing of applications. The problem is considerably worse for disabled students, most of whom can't manage without additional assistance.

A spokesperson for the SLC said, "We are currently reviewing the process and procedures for targeted students in consultation with relevant organisations and special interest groups and we will also be improving the training of specialist advisers."

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/8495290.stm>

For the full report, see: <http://www.bis.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/publications/Delivery-of-Financial-Support-to-Students.pdf>.

- **Harsh test for disability benefit to be reviewed**

The Department for Work and Pensions is to review the work capability assessment test – a key part of its welfare-to-work programme – after being warned that it was deeply flawed and would lead to many disabled people, and those with genuine

health problems, being unfairly penalised.

The test was brought in because the government wants to slash the number of people on incapacity benefit by one million from its current total of 2.7 million

Disability groups, which had supported the reforms in the belief that they would tackle "disability poverty", say the assessment does not reflect how an impairment impacts on someone's everyday life or ability to work.

Evidence from the first tests showed that many people who needed help were being wrongly judged as fit to seek work. As a result, they were being placed on a lower benefit and denied access to programmes to help them find suitable employment, such as Pathways to Work, specifically set up to help those on incapacity benefit.

Figures for new claimants showed that, of the 193,800 people who made a claim between October 2008 and February 2009, 36% were found to be fit for work and therefore not eligible for the higher rate benefit.

A spokesman for the Department for Work and Pensions said: "This is a relatively new process... We will be reviewing it to see where improvements and changes need to be made to ensure that it is working as it should be."

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2010/jan/03/retreat-on-draconian-disability-testing>

- **Tories promise £1m to help disabled people into political office and the civil service**

If they come to power in the forthcoming elections, the Conservative Party says they will create a fund to support disabled people who want to become MPs, local councilors or civil servants.

The money will be spent to cover such things as adapting premises, sign language interpreters, specialised equipment, travel and support workers.

The £1m will be spread over four years. It will come from savings on what is now being spent by Equalities Office, including the

Equality and Human Rights Commission's (EHRC) budget. This move is part of the Tory Party's policy of making Parliament more reflective of the country as a whole. For example, 20% of the population is disabled, compared to only 5% of MPs .

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2010/jan/14/tories-plan-fund-disabled-people>

Editorial comment: New money? There is no new money. The money will come, in part, by cutting funds to the EHRC, a body set up to promote equality for disabled people and other groups. It is highly questionable whether the EHRC can afford to do with a million pounds less when at the moment it is not keeping up with the demand for support from disabled individuals. Finally, £250,000 a year is a derisory sum to cover support for all political offices, as well as employment in the civil service.

International

- **87 DPOs receive support from the Disability Rights Fund**

The Disability Rights Fund (DRF), a collaborative among donors and disability activists to support the human rights of disabled people around the world, has announced 65 new grants totalling \$1,382,050 to Disabled Persons' Organizations (DPOs) in eleven countries.

Since its founding in 2008, DRF has gifted over \$2.7 million to 87 different organizations in fourteen countries

The grants support DPOs to raise awareness about human rights, build coalitions and networks, and develop advocacy and monitoring activities in connection with the UN Convention.

Some examples of those receiving grants include:

- A grassroots organization of disabled women addressing violence against women in Northern Uganda.
- An emergent Nicaraguan group of deaf blind people.
- A national umbrella organization in Papua New Guinea, campaigning for CRPD ratification.

For a full list of those receiving grants and the details of their projects see: <http://www.disabilityrightsfund.org/grantees.html>

Editorial comment: The DRF's providing direct, and mainly small scale, financial support to DPOs is something that Southern DPOs have long wanted to see. Until now, many of these organizations have served as little more than raw material in the funding strategies of large, often paternalist, disability charities. This has meant many projects were staffed by outsiders, as well as being decided upon and ultimately controlled by those charities. Hopefully, this essentially neo-colonial pattern of engagement will be replaced by the DRF model which we trust will see control devolved to the grass roots where it belongs.

DAA is also pleased to see that what the DRF is doing corresponds closely to what DPOs have demanded in **Equalise It. A Manifesto for Disability Equality in Development Cooperation.**

<http://www.daa.org.uk/index.php?page=equalise-it>

- **Canada: Family told to leave country because of disabled daughter**



Rachel Barlagne with her parents

A French family who immigrated to Montreal in 2005 has now been told they must leave the country because their daughter has cerebral palsy and places an "excessive burden on social services." David Barlagne said, 'I was told that once my business

was established in Canada after a couple of years, I could make a request for permanent residency and that it would simply be a formality.'

The Citizenship and Immigration Canada has rejected Barlagne's request because his seven-year-old daughter Rachel is considered "medically inadmissible." □□ All applicants seeking permanent residency in Canada must pass a medical exam. Barlagne and his wife passed the medical, as did their other daughter, 10-year-old Lara. But Rachel was rejected even though the immigration official who made the final decision never actually met her.

Barlagne is seeking a judicial review in Federal Court of Immigration. The hearing is scheduled on Feb. 23. □□ If they lose, the family would have to leave the country immediately. If they were to win, the review would mean that another Immigration Canada adjudicator would have to look over their file and not necessarily reverse the earlier decision. □□
<http://www.ottawacitizen.com/health/French+family+denied+residency+daughter+cerebral+palsy/2394138/story.html>

For a more in depth analysis of Canada's disabilist immigration policy, see: <http://newsocialist.org/newsite/index.php?id=717>

Editorial comment: Fortunately for the Canadian Government, they have not yet ratified the UN Convention. If they had then this outrageous, blatant discrimination could have made an important test case. Although immigration is not mentioned specifically in the Convention, this kind of discrimination is clearly against its spirit. Furthermore, Article 4 (b) says that states should '... take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices that constitute discrimination against persons with disabilities.'

Of course, Canada is not alone in having such a discriminatory immigration policy towards disabled people. Australia too bars almost all disabled immigrants, as does New Zealand.
<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/11/17/2744616.htm>,

How do your country's immigration laws match up to the spirit of the UN Convention? Please let us know and we will publish the information in the newsletter.

- **Europe: Disability Pact launched in Brussels**

On 27 January 2010, the Disability Intergroup (DI) of the European Parliament and the European Disability Forum presented the Disability Pact to a hundred of activists and 20 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) from various political groups and nationalities.

The Disability Intergroup is an informal grouping of MEPs who are interested in promoting disability policy. Ádám Kósa MEP (Hungary), the first disabled person to be president of DI, said: "I have a dream that persons with disabilities will finally decide for themselves. The full ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as well as the adoption of the Disability Pact by the EU Member States are the necessary steps to achieve this dream that I share with 65 million persons with disabilities in Europe".

The Disability Pact for 2011 to 2021 is a disability policy at European and national level with clear and long-term direction and cooperation between Member States and the EU. At the moment, the 27 member states are developing their own national disability action plans. It is hoped that the Pact will help create a higher degree of convergence and foster cooperation between the European and national actions on disability.

<http://www.edf-feph.org>

<http://www.disabilitypact.eu>

- **India: Disabled girl beaten to death by father**

In the state of Kerala, a seven-year-old girl with multiple impairments was thrashed to death by her father. The man, T. Abdulla (33), admitted his guilt to police, saying he was unable to bear the child's plight.

http://vyganews.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4028:man-thrashes-physically-challenged-daughter-to-death&catid=81:kerala&Itemid=458

- **India: Schools warned not to exclude disabled pupils**

The Indian Constitution guarantees inclusive education. Nonetheless, most of the country's schools continue to deny places to disabled students. This is the important reason why 77% of the country's disabled children are not in education and only 17% are literate.

Because of numerous complaints, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), which has authority over more than 9000 schools, has issued a strongly worded circular to all its members. In it, clear guidance is given about what is expected in terms of inclusive education. Furthermore, schools are warned if they do not comply they may face losing their affiliation.

<http://cbse.nic.in/circulars/cir65-2009.pdf>

<http://www.disabilityindia.com/html/news.html#cbsecd>

- **Haiti: What is happening to disabled people?**

The 800,000 disabled Haitians faced terrible conditions before the earthquake. Since the earthquake, with most of Haiti's infrastructure destroyed, it is difficult to imagine how disabled people, of whom there will now be many more, will survive. When access to the basics of life becomes difficult for everyone, for many disabled people it becomes impossible. This occurs at all phases of a natural disaster; escaping, in and around camps, upon returning home and during recovery. What steps are being taken to ensure that disabled people will be supported?

Although there are some specialist disability rehab charities, i.e. Handicap International and the Christian Blind Mission (CBM), working on Haiti, what of the mainstream relief organisations and governments?

Disabled Persons' International (DPI) has urged its member organisations and individuals to contact their governments to ensure the needs of disabled people in Haiti are being met. They point out that while a number of the articles of the UN Convention apply, Article 11 is very specific. It obliges states that have ratified to take all steps needed to protect disabled people during humanitarian and natural disasters.

The UN Committee on the CRPD has also issued a statement urging the government of Haiti to ensure that disabled people fully participate in the decision-making process regarding social and economic reconstruction and that their long-term development needs be taken into account.

<http://v1.dpi.org/lang-en/resources/newsletter-details.php?page=796>

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=33715&Cr=Haiti&Cr1=>

- **Haiti: Free health manual on line in Creole**

Hesperian, a nonprofit publisher of community health books in Berkeley, California, has posted free downloads of emergency health information in Haitian Creole to help doctors, nurses, and others assisting victims of the devastating earthquake.

The general lack of appropriate health resources in the Creole language makes Hesperian's materials particularly useful in Haiti today.

The World Health Organization considers Hesperian's flagship book, **Where There Is No Doctor**, "the most widely used health manual in the world." This book has been produced in more than 80 languages and is used on every continent.

"No matter who you are or where you live," says Hesperian Executive Director Sarah Shannon, "everyone should have the right to health care and free access to health information."

<http://www.hesperian.org/>

Editorial comment: The book was written in the 1970s by David Werner, a world-famous disabled community activist and author. He was closely involved with the disabled-person-led Projimo Project in Mexico and wrote about it in **Nothing About Us Without Us**. Werner also wrote **Disabled Village Children**, a book used extensively in Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) programmes throughout the world. All these books can be downloaded for free from the Hesperian website.

- **Romania: Prime Minister promises a proactive stance on disability**

The Romanian Disability Council (CNDR) supported by Yannis Vardakastanis, president of the European Disability Forum (EDF), met on January 15th with Emil Boc, the Romanian Prime Minister, to consider measures to increase participation of disabled people in national decision making.

Yannis Vardakastanis proposed a permanent consultation between the government and the CNDR. There was no indication if this had been agreed. However, Emil Boc did agree that a minister would attend an EU ministerial meeting in Spain in May 2010, where the EDF will propose a Disability Pact. This pact aims to ensure coordinated action on disability across the EU.

EDF expressed its concerns about the ratification process for UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The European Union decided to deposit the formal confirmation only when all Member States complete the ratification of the Convention. So far only twelve Member States have ratified. Emil Boc pledged to submit the ratification to the Romanian Parliament in the coming months.

<http://www.edf-feph.org/default.asp>

- **Uganda: National DPO heads HIV/Aids awareness campaign for disabled people**

The National Union of Disabled Persons in Uganda (NUDIPU) is a national coalition of disabled peoples organisations that campaigns for human rights and inclusion. It is distributing information on HIV/Aids prevention to end the 'myth' that disabled people are not sexually active and are free from infection

According to Suleiman Kafero, NUDIPU's programme assistant on disability and HIV/Aids, most materials being distributed by other development organisations did not cater for disabled people, despite this group being particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation and infection.

Funded by the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), NUDIPU has begun distributing information materials in the districts of Soroti, Gulu and Masaka, In Soroti, materials are being given out in the sub-counties of Katine, Kadungulu, the Eastern division and Soroti Municipality.

"Ignorance on factual information has been, and is, a problem affecting disabled people and this is what we are fighting", said Kafero. He went on to point out that NUDIPU recognises the fact that poverty among disabled people is one of the major reasons the virus spreads because it makes them highly vulnerable to performing sex for money.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/katine/2010/jan/05/hiv-aids-disabilities>

- **USA: Parents fight to end abuse of disabled children in schools**

Florida parents and special-education advocates are trying to get a law passed that would prevent schools from restraining children face-down or shutting them in rooms.

There are also attempts at a national level to end these and similar practices. This follows a U.S. Government Accountability Office report that found hundreds of cases of alleged abuse and several children killed when school and treatment centers used these methods. The findings support a Human Rights Watch survey on corporal punishment of disabled pupils we highlighted in our September 2009 Newsletter.

<http://www.daa.org.uk/index.php?mact=Blogs,cntnt01,showentry,0&cntnt01entryid=47&cntnt01returnid=98>

One parent was able to get the Palm Beach County school district to agree to document each occasion in which a staff member restrained a child after she discovered that her son had been held down at least 80 times.

In another case, a 14-year-old autistic boy was dragged on his hands and knees and thrown into a dark room by his teacher and an aide. When he tried to get out of the room, the teacher slammed the door shut on his hand, leaving him in the room with a bleeding and broken finger.

The bill has failed in previous years, in part because of opposition from school officials who say such practices can be done safely and are needed to keep children from hurting themselves or others.

Florida is among 19 states with no laws or regulations governing the use of restraint or seclusion.

<http://www.palmbeachpost.com/news/schools/parents-ban-schools-from-restraining-students-with-autism-177665.html>

For Government Accountability Office report see:

<http://edlabor.house.gov/documents/111/pdf/testimony/20090519GregKutzTestimony.pdf>

- **USA: Disability discrimination rises in the US**

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has announced that 93,277 workplace discrimination charges were filed during Fiscal Year (FY) 2009, the second highest level ever. Of these, 21,451 were cases involving disability discrimination. This represented a 10% increase compared to the previous year.

The reason for the near record levels of discrimination charges remains unclear, but may be due to stepped up enforcement under the present administration.

<http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/newsroom/release/1-6-10.cfm>

<http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/statistics/enforcement/ada-charges.cfm>

- **Zambia: Message on HIV/Aids from Zambian Deaf Youth and Women**

DAA wants to share with you this email we received from our colleagues in Zambia. We would like to encourage readers of 'Our Rights' to send us such news about their struggles for human rights which otherwise might not reach disabled people.

It is only when common problems are identified by disabled people that we can work together and learn from each other the most effective ways to move forward. This is something the International

Disability Movement needs in order to maintain its integrity, its strength of purpose and its relevance to the day-to-day lives of disabled people.

There is nothing more truthful and, therefore, more powerful than the united voices of grassroots activists.

“Dear Readers

Deaf People throughout Zambia are often left out of HIV and AIDS community programmes and services. For example, organisations such as ZNAN, TALC, CHEP, SFH, USAIDS, DAFT, PAFT, MEF, MOH etc. don't even include or target Deaf Youth and Women. In this article, a group of Zambia Deaf Youth and Women talk about their experiences and set out a plan of action to promote the involvement of disabled people in community HIV and AIDS services.

Access to health care

Many of our Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) sites are inaccessible, which means that very few Deaf Youth and Women come forward for HIV testing. From our experience, we have found that people with a hearing impairment often get turned away from VCT sites because the staff don't know how to communicate with us.

Furthermore, many health care workers have a negative attitude towards Deaf women who are pregnant or who come for family planning advice. These workers don't have the necessary skills or training in how to deal with disability and sexuality. This puts Deaf women off from getting advice and puts them at high risk of HIV infection.

Deaf Children

In our communities we still find that parents of Deaf Children are not aware that their children have rights. Many of these parents are over protective and feel it's not important to teach their children about sex out of fear they may want to practice. In some cases sending their children for sterilization.

Rising to the challenge

The issue of disability and HIV is one of basic human rights. We need to make sure our communities involve Deaf Youth and Women in HIV and AIDS services. We propose the following actions:

- Organizing marches through our communities so that Deaf Youth and Women can draw attention to the neglect of their rights and needs regarding HIV and AIDS services
- Carry out disability awareness workshops amongst health care workers, highlighting difficulties in accessing HIV information
- Educate families of Deaf persons on the right to information on sexuality and HIV issues
- Working together with disabled people, we CAN rise to the challenge of HIV and AIDS!"

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