

World Autism Awareness Day; 2 April 2018

Address by UN Resident Co-ordinator of UN Bhutan

Opening Quote

“It takes a village to raise a child. It takes a child with autism to raise the consciousness of the village.” How true are the words of the famous ‘child whisperer’ Coach Elaine Hall.

Kuzuzangpola

Parents and families of special children, Chairperson of ABS Board of Trustees Dasho Kunzang Wangdi, distinguished guests, ABS Partners, CSO Colleagues, volunteers, ladies and gentlemen.

Opening

- Today is a special day for us to celebrate special people. Today is the day we put a spotlight on the hurdles that people with autism and others living with autism face every day.

SG’s Message Secretary-General António Guterres

- "On World Autism Awareness Day, let us reaffirm our commitment to promote the full participation of all people with autism, and ensure they have the necessary support to be able to exercise their rights and fundamental freedoms.
- Our work for gender equality and women’s empowerment must reach all the world’s women and girls. And our efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals must uphold the 2030 Agenda’s core promise to leave no one behind.’

- As the UN Secretary-General said, today is the day we stand up for the rights of the people with autism and speak out against discrimination against them.

Empowering women and girls with Autism

- This year we rededicate ourselves by giving added importance to empowering women and girls with autism.
- By doing so we enhance our work on achieving gender equality and empowering our women and girls. This is a chance to reach out to all the women and girls around the world. It also gives us a chance to work on our efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals which upholds the 2030 Agenda's core promise to leave no one behind.

UN's global observance on World Autism Awareness Day

- In 2008, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities entered into force, reaffirming the fundamental principle of universal human rights for all.
- This year, the World Autism Awareness Day focuses on the importance of empowering women and girls with autism and involving them and their representative organizations in policy and decision making to address these challenges.
- The United Nations worldwide is relooking at challenges and opportunities in fully exercising rights in matters relating to marriage, family and parenthood on an equal basis with others.

Bhutan Context

- Gross National Happiness embodies a strong commitment to realizing the equal rights of all, including people with disabilities. Bhutan's concept of GNH is a leading example of the progress that we have made towards the goal of 'leaving no one behind.'

UN Support to Bhutan

- As a popular Bhutanese saying goes, *“Kha Da Lapp Thuen Go,”* what we say and what we do needs to be one, it needs to be together.
- For the first time in Bhutan, the UN (UNDP, UNICEF and WHO) in close collaboration with the RGoB and Civil Society, initiated the Joint Programme on disability to help advance the rights of people with disability in Bhutan.
- With the support from UN Partnership to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disability this USD 400,000 joint programme will invest in the meaningful engagement of people with disabilities in the development and implementation of policy reforms focused on leaving no one behind.
- Direct support by UNICEF: As a sustainable approach to developing in-country capacity for education of children with disabilities (CWDs), UNICEF is supporting Paro College of Education to launch a Post Graduate Diploma in Inclusive Education to increase access to inclusive education for CWDs. In 2017, the first standards on inclusive education were developed and launched by the Ministry of Education at the National Inclusive Education conference. They also are about to release a Handbook for Families and Caregivers of Children with Disabilities.
- Direct support by UNDP: Support to Vulnerable Baseline Assessment and Analysis of the Disabled: with the launch of the first Bhutan Vulnerability Assessment. Progress was made to advance the rights of persons with disabilities in Bhutan including by improving understanding of the impact of ratifying the convention for the rights of persons with disabilities in Bhutan. UNDP has also supported in drafting the National Disability Policy.

CSO Development

- The role of civil society in working with the Royal Government to advance a rights-based approach and improve participation and accountability is increasingly recognized. CSOs have an important role to play to help vulnerable groups have their voices heard and acted on.
- The role and effectiveness of civil society will be increasingly important as a bridge between vulnerable groups and the government.
- For this reason, we the UN believe capacity development of CSOs is very important for the country and a most critical action for the UN as we assist on the last mile as we complete LDC graduation.
- The UN in Bhutan is working on supporting CSOs capacity development in many ways.
- Strengthening CSO resource mobilization capacity, supporting networking and partnering among Bhutanese CSOs is one of those. Our next training workshop on strengthening CSOs will be next month and any CSO interested in strengthening their resource mobilization and project management skills is asked to reach out to either myself or a colleague from my office.
- I would like to commend the Ability Bhutan Society for the excellent work you have been doing in helping the people of Bhutan ‘see the person and not the disability.’ Let me also commend the advocacy work you are doing...a number of your advocacy videos are very strong in the way they elicit understanding of the challenges of autism and the way they invite the viewer into action.
- Their Majesties’ vision of a compassionate and just society has been made possible because of your work. Ability Bhutan Society is a most practical example of Gross National Happiness.

Closing

- For the UN family in Bhutan, it's a great privilege for us to walk alongside the RGoB, the CSOs and the people of Bhutan on this often challenging road. Thank you for this opportunity.
- Let us all pledge on this special day to give assurance to every child, woman and man that they are first and foremost a human being and autism is just one aspect of their character.
- We must all be thankful to the staff and volunteers of the various CSOs who tirelessly worked towards making autism an issue that is gaining more understanding and who empower those with autism.
- Lastly, let us pledge to work and care for children and people with autism by understanding their behavior and how they perceive the world. Let us try to look at the World through their eyes as this will very likely assist with our learning and growth.

Kadinchey and Tashi Delek