

Workshop on Article 19 in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities "living independently and being included in the community"

Stars of Hope Society (SHS) for empowering women with disabilities in Palestine in collaboration with Handicap International (HI), a French NGO working in the field of disability held on 30th, October, 2008 workshop on article 19 in the UN convention for persons with disabilities "living independently and being included in the community" at Grand Park Hotel in Ramallah. International experts in the field of disability, presenters of Palestinian ministries, local disability organizations, international and local donators, and number of disabled persons.

Mr. Philippe Chaize HI regional director and Mrs. Ola Abu Elghiab the chairwoman of SHS welcomed the participants and opened the workshop. Mr. Ghaize started his speech by mentioning the items of the article 19 about the living independently and being included in the community, he also hoped to have a practical experiences for this article in Palestine. Mrs. Abu ElGhaib gave the audience a definition about the independent living philosophy as Dr. Adolf Ratzka from Sweden whom considered the father of Independent living philosophy.



The first session was about assessing challenges and opportunities to independent living and participation of people with disabilities in the community, it was directed by Mr. Alexandre Cote, HI regional manager for technical unit. He stated the session by dividing the participants into five groups in order to define independent living within the Palestinian context. Many different definitions rose up such as mainstreaming education, accessibility in the physical environment which reduces dependency on others, living with dignity and honor, lobbying movement for changing the legislations, financial independency through work.....



Then he opened the discussion about the obstacles and facilitators for independent living in Palestine, as a conclusion the main obstacles were poor governmental support, absent of researches which reflect the reality of disabled people in Palestine, also the needs and challenges for people with disabilities are not recognized by families, disabilities organizations. After that he presented a survey done by HI in Kosovo in 2002, to analyze the situation for people with disabilities and to find out the obstacles and facilitators for independent living of disabled people. The sample size was 400 questionnaires filled by disabled people, the response was 391. The results showed that 68 % showed of the participants showed that family is a facilitator for independent living, and the obstacles were physical environment, access to education and unemployment.



The second session coordinated by Mr. Darryl Barret, HI regional coordinator for disability services. It's title is a practical support to independent living. He explained two models for independent living which are: centralized vertical model in which the government is responsible for all levels of service, and peripheral horizontal model in which government is responsible for financial support while service is directed by disability organizations. He presented the Australian experience in independent living centers and the services provided by them such as accommodation support, family support, intensive behavioral support, home and community care programs, social support, employment services, advocacy.....etc. He also gave the Serbian of independent living experience as a one in the developing countries.



The third and last session was given by Dr. Adolf Ratzka about the development of Swedish independent living movement. He defines it as a philosophy, a way of looking at disability and society, and a worldwide movement of people with disabilities who proclaim to work for self-determination, self-respect and equal opportunities. He emphasizes that the Independent Living philosophy postulates that people with disabilities are the best experts on their needs.



He explained that the principles of independent living philosophy are: de-professionalization and self-representation, de-medicalization of disability, de-institutionalization and cross-disability (i.e. inclusion in the IL Movement regardless of diagnoses).

He concluded his speech in clarifying that Independent Living does not mean that we want to do everything by ourselves, do not need anybody or like to live in isolation. Independent Living means that we demand the same choices and control in our everyday lives that our non-disabled brothers and sisters, neighbors and friends take for granted.

The feedback of the Audience about the concept varied some of the participants appreciated this concept and considered it as a key of development for the society, others consider it as wasting time and money, a considerable percentage of the the audience wasn't interested in the idea and they didn't understand it.

At the end of the conference Handicap International and Stars of Hope Society announced that they will continue working on exploring different mechanisms of how to support the rights of people with disabilities to determine their life choices and be more independent.