

African Disability Forum (ADF) established at Regional Meeting

A meeting of nearly 40 regional and national leaders of organisations of persons with disabilities (DPOs) in Africa, which took place 17-19 November 2014, at the UN Conference Centre, Addis Ababa, established the African Disability Forum (ADF). The ADF aims to unify and amplify the voice of Africans with disabilities, their families and their organizations in advocating for their rights and inclusion in all aspects of development and society at Pan African, sub-regional and national levels. Until today, Africa was the only continent lacking a representative regional umbrella organization of DPOs, despite the existence of many separate DPOs. The DPO leaders, from over 20 African countries, decided upon the ADF membership and governance structure, approved a draft Constitution and planned next steps for its operation.

The ADF is an initiative of Mr. Shuaib Chalklen, the UN Special Rapporteur on Disability of the Commission for Social Development who chaired the Regional Meeting. The Deputy Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa, Mr. Adballa Hamdok welcomed and commended the Special Rapporteur and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) for the initiative, noting “The number of people with disabilities in Africa is increasing and we are not talking about a small minority— it is estimated that up to 15 per cent of the African population live with some sort of disability. As Africa is rising, we don't want to lose the chance to have participation from more than 15% of our society.”

Senior Social Welfare Officer of the African Union Commission, Mr. Lefhoko Kesamang, also welcomed the ADF, stating that “The ADF will come in handy to speed up the implementation of the Africa Union Disability Architecture and UN Convention on the Rights of persons with Disabilities by African countries. The AU has been yearning to have a platform where DPOs could engage Heads of State and governments at the continental level as one. In this way the AU will be able to hear one voice rather than several voices. Through the establishment of the Forum, we have an opportunity to do something groundbreaking. We hope that networks across Africa will be strengthened and ultimately people with disabilities will be empowered to enjoy their rights.”

Mr. Guozhong Zhang, Social Affairs Officer representing the co-host the Secretariat for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities DESA based in New York, underscored that “The birth of the African Disability Forum comes at the very right time, at a critical historical juncture, when the international community are at the final stage of achieving the MDGs and considering a new global development agenda in the next phase after 2015.” He expressed that “DESA as the UN disability focal point will look forward to ... close cooperation with all in the ADF, the AU and ECA. Together, we are stronger, and together we can help make a difference in advancing sustainable and inclusive development for all, including people with disabilities.”

The launch meeting was made possible with support from the UN DESA and in collaboration with the AU and ECA as well as development partner organizations including the Abilis Foundation of Finland and the Norwegian Association of the Disabled. An Interim Working Group (IWG), created following a consultative meeting on the proposed ADF which took place in Nov. 2012, was assigned the task to undertake the necessary organizational registration and guide the work of the ADF during its initial stage until a formal Executive Council is elected at the first ADF General Assembly, to be held in 2015. The IWG is composed of 10 leaders of continental, sub-regional and national organizations of DPOs, and includes men, women and youth leaders with disabilities from Algeria, Burkina Faso, Cameroun, Gabon, Kenya, Niger, Mauritania, Morocco, South Africa, Uganda, and Zambia.

Further information about the ADF, contact the UN Special Rapporteur: Tel: +2782 775 1175, email: chalklenshuaib68@gmail.com