Changing the way people see disABILITY

MANILA (ILO News) - Persons with disabilities often face lack of work opportunities or low wages compared to non-disabled persons. “In the world of employment, discrimination against persons with disabilities happen. Often, they are the last to be hired but the first to be fired,” said Mr Richard Arceño, National Coordinator of the Philippine Council of Cheshire Homes for the Disabled (PhilCOCHED).

ILO estimates that people with disabilities represent 10 per cent of the world’s population, or some 650 million people worldwide. Approximately 470 million are of working age. In a forum on the “Right to Work of Persons with Disabilities” held in line with the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, the ILO Manila highlighted the need for decent work and equal opportunity. “We hope that more people understand disability issues and make efforts to realize a community where people with disabilities can fully and equally enjoy human rights. Women and men with disabilities can be and are productive members of society”, according to ILO Manila.

Employers gave their testimonies on hiring persons with disabilities. “We have been working with visually-impaired and wheelchair-bound. We overcome this through Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Our staff though visually impaired type faster than sighted. Touch typists are the fastest in the world. They have higher productivity”, said Mr Thomas Ng, President of Genashtim Philippines, Inc. “We are a socially responsible organization. We create win-win solutions. Persons with disabilities provide strategic advantage because of stability. In the future, we think we can hire hundreds or even thousands.”

Ms Edelwisa Panlaqui, Programme Manager of SMART Communications shared her experiences of working with persons with disabilities. “In our office, persons with disabilities are governed by the same rules and same metrics. We have an employee who started as a household helper but persevered to become a teacher and now he is working with us at SMART Communications. Only one eye is functioning due to a congenital defect but even if he is visually-impaired, he can give those with 20-20 clear vision a run from their money,” said Ms Panlaqui.

Over a hundred persons with disabilities, government officials, employers from public and private sectors, resource speakers, non-government organizations and advocates joined the forum. PhilCOCHED, a non-profit organization for persons with disabilities, organized the forum. The forum included the launch of PhilCOCHED’s Access to Livelihood: Economic Empowerment Programme funded by UK-based Leonard Cheshire Disability to ensure recognition of the right to work of persons with disabilities and to improve their lives economically.

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