

The Global Context of Inclusion: The Role of the United Nations

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At the conclusion of the World Summit on Children which took place at the United Nations Headquarters in New York in May 2002, the world's Heads of State made the following commitment:

“Each girl and boy is born free and equal in dignity and rights; therefore all forms of discrimination affecting children must end. We will take all measures to ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including equal access to health, education and recreational services, by children with disabilities and children with special needs to ensure the recognition of their dignity; to promote their self reliance and to facilitate their active participation in the community”
(*A World Fit for Children: Plan of Action*, para 21, United Nations 2002).

This commitment can be considered as the culmination of 50 years of leadership which the United Nations has provided to the world-wide movement for human rights and social inclusion. It is notable because the rights of children with disabilities were included as an integral part of a commitment to meet the human rights of all children and also because it was the children from all over the world who were present at the World Summit who themselves identified disabled children as among those who need to be included in the National Plans of Action which all governments have been asked to draw up. Voluntary organisations world-wide are determined to ensure that the momentum is maintained and that governments take action to implement the commitments which they have made and narrow the gap between principles and practice.

The scope of United Nations initiatives

The aim of this paper is to provide an overview of the work of United Nations organisations and agencies in the field of human rights in general and the rights of disabled children and adults in particular. The UN's commitment to human rights underpins the whole of its work in the social and humanitarian field, as expressed in its Charter and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).

Since the UN system can do nothing without the agreement and financial backing of its member states, it has to persuade governments to make international commitments to humanitarian and social development in general and to human rights in particular and above all to try to use its influence to ensure that the rhetoric of UN principles is translated to reality at grass roots level in their countries.

Up to this point, the UN has operated at a number of levels. It has created a number of legally binding international Conventions or treaties, together with mechanisms for public monitoring and accountability. In this chapter, we will focus on the impact of

the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), as it illustrates the strengths and weaknesses inherent in the use of international treaties. The UN High Commission on Human Rights has now ruled that all UN Conventions apply fully to disabled persons. These include Conventions on Racial Discrimination (1965), Civil and Political Rights (1966), Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), Women (1979) and Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984).

Quinn and Degener (2002) and Herr, Gostin and Koh (2003) have published detailed critiques of all UN conventions in relation to the rights of disabled people, while Lachwitz and Breitenbach (2002) have prepared a briefer analysis for the use of non-governmental organisations. These analyses are proving useful in work on a proposed new UN Convention on the Fundamental Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The first steps have been taken but the process of drafting and securing agreement to such a Convention will take many years and is not guaranteed a successful outcome, as several countries and groups have expressed strong reservations. Much will depend on the strength of the lobbies and their ability to maintain a united front (see www.inclusion-international.org for updates).

The UN has also issued a range of universal and specific Declarations on Human Rights which are not legally binding but which have proved useful as a catalyst for the development of national policies and provided a global framework for local advocacy and lobbying. These include the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Persons with Mental Retardation (1971) and the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons (1975). These were followed by global programmes such as the International Year of Disabled Persons (1981), the Decade of Disabled Persons (1983-1992) underpinned by the World Programme of Action (UN 1983) which is still regarded as a beacon document. UN regional offices have launched two Asian Decades of Disabled Persons (1993-2002; 2003-2012) and the African Decade of Disabled Persons (2001-2010). The most influential initiative to date has been the impact of the UN Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (UN 1993) (to be discussed below). Although these initiatives have for the most part been beneficial and productive, the fact that they were not legally binding and that governments were not held internationally accountable has weakened their impact and strengthened the demand for a Convention.

In addition, many UN agencies have initiated their own programmes. We will consider the contribution of UNESCO in the field of inclusive education in general and education of disabled children in particular, with particular reference to the impetus created by the Salamanca Declaration and Framework for Action. Other relevant agencies include the World Health Organisation (WHO), the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF). Many others with a more general remit are also now considering the needs of disabled children: these include the High Commission on Human Rights and the High Commission on Refugees (www.inclusion-international.org).

Human rights – inclusive or specific?

Some critics have argued that because disabled people are automatically included in universal human rights instruments, there is no need for separate initiatives specifically for disabled people and that such campaigns can be counterproductive and increase rather than decrease discrimination (Helander, 1993).

Organisations of disabled people as well as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in the field have lobbied hard to ensure that their interests are included in these generic initiatives but have met with only limited success. They complain that disability issues are either ignored completely, or subliminally subsumed under terms such as 'children in difficult circumstances' and that even when there is a specific reference to disability, this is lost in a long list of other marginalised groups and subsequently ignored.

This tension is fundamental to the struggle for inclusion. Disabled people want to be included as equals in society and its institutions but experience of discrimination and exclusion at every level, including the UN, forces them to campaign for legislation which guarantees their specific rights and entitlements. Once generic instruments effectively protect and promote the interests of disabled people, there will be no need for further specific instruments. In the meantime, disabled people will fight for legislation which safeguards their rights.

Currently, the emphasis is on a twin or multi-track approach in which disability advocates campaign simultaneously for their full inclusion in both generic and disability-focused instruments and initiatives. There are indications that this is meeting with some success. UNHCHR have insisted that there must be specific reference to the rights of disabled people and to appropriate statistical data in the reports which all governments are required to make to the monitoring mechanisms required by international laws governing Conventions. NGOs are free to report independently to these bodies and frequently do so if they disagree with the official accounts given by their national governments (Jones, 2001).

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) has been ratified by every country in the world, with the exception of the United States and Somalia. Ratifying countries are required to submit regular reports and to attend sittings of the Committee on Children's Rights of the UN High Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. The Commission's reports on each country are published on the internet. NGOs in the field of children's and disability rights are very active and have a key role in the monitoring process. Moreover, they have set up a strong communication and collaboration network and are well supported by the High Commission itself.

The International Save the Children Alliance published *Children's Rights: Equal Rights?* (2000) documenting examples of discrimination from 26 countries, including reports from governments and NGOs as well as the Commission's recommendations. The Alliance has also disseminated a CD ROM which provides detailed information on the human rights of disabled children in most countries of the world (Jones 2001) - an invaluable but alarming source of information.

Articles of the CRC (with comments by Quinn and Degener (2002) marked QD).

The four fundamental principles underlying the CRC apply to all children, without exception. These are non-discrimination (on any grounds, including disability); the best interests of the child; the right to life, survival and development; the right to be heard and to participate.

These are cross-cutting principles and inform the interpretation and application of each article of the Convention for all children.

Article 23 is specifically concerned with disabled children but some of its language and concepts seem out of date by today's standards (see italics, added).

i) "States Parties recognise that a mentally or physically disabled child *should* enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community.

QD: States are not required to take steps to achieve this aim..

ii) States Parties recognise the rights of disabled children to *special care.....subject to available resources...*

Particular exception has been taken to the reference to "subject to available resources", as even in 1989 this qualification would not have been applied to, for example, the education of girls, or children from ethnic minorities. Its use for disabled children has been widely condemned as grossly discriminatory.

The use of the term "special care" has also been heavily criticised because it carries the wrong resonance in the disability field. However, a reading of the whole Convention shows that the word is widely used in a non-discriminatory sense.

QD: By failing to specify how States should secure these rights, this paragraph treats disabled children less favourably than the more specific articles on refugees and on protection from abuse. Access to appropriate services is not set out as a matter of right or as a general entitlement based on need.

iii) Recognising the special needs of a disabled child, assistance extendedshall be provided free of charge, *whenever possible, taking account of the financial resources of the parents and others caring for the child*, and shall be designed to ensure that the child has effective access to and receives education, training, health care services, rehabilitation services, preparation for employment, including his or her cultural and spiritual development.

QD: Further reference to resources and still no clear needs-based entitlement or right to these services.

iv) States Parties shall promote, in the spirit of international cooperation, the exchange of appropriate information in the field of preventive health care and of medical, psychological and functional treatment of disabled children, including dissemination of and access to information concerning methods of rehabilitation, education and vocational services...."

The wording here reflects a medical rather than a social model. This is also reflected in the reporting and monitoring arrangements which categorise disability as a health issue.

Other articles of particular relevance to disabled children include: right to remain with the family (9); views of the child to be taken into account (12); services to support parents (18); protection of children without families (20); refugee children (22); right

to highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for treatment of illness and rehabilitation (24); right to periodic review of treatment (25); primary education free and compulsory to all, prevention of drop-out (28); education directed to the development of personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential (29); children of minorities or indigenous people (30); protection from work which interferes with education (32); protection from drug abuse (33); protection from sexual exploitation (34); torture and deprivation of liberty (37); rehabilitative care for victims of neglect, exploitation, abuse or degrading treatment (39).

Meeting the challenge of exclusion

The rights of children listed in the Convention stand in stark contrast to the statistics of exclusion which have been known for many years but which are only now beginning to impinge on the media and on the general public (eg UNICEF's annual reports *State of the World's Children*; Watkins, 2000). For example,

- 113 million children never attend school, two thirds of whom are girls
- Another 150 million children drop out of school before they can read or write
- Less than two per cent of disabled children attend any form of school in income-poor countries
- One in four adults - 872 million people - cannot read or write. Two thirds are women
- In 16 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, enrolment rates have actually fallen
- For every child killed in armed conflict, three more are injured or permanently disabled. Ten million children are psychologically traumatised by armed conflicts.

Education for All: some landmark

World Declaration on Education for All, Jomtien, 1990

As an immediate follow-up to the CRC, 155 governments and numerous NGOs concerned with children sent delegates to a major UN conference held in Jomtien, Thailand and agreed to aim for certain targets by 2000. Later in the same year, the world's leaders committed themselves to these targets at a one day Summit on Children at the United Nations in New York. More targets were added in 1995 at the World Summits on Social Development in Copenhagen and on Women at Beijing and a ten year review at Dakar, Senegal in 2000 resulted in further revisions and new initiatives designed to speed up progress.

These targets include:

- Completion of the full period of primary education for all children: 2000 (now 2015)
- Reduction of adult illiteracy by half
- Elimination of gender disparities: getting all girls into school would save 2 million lives a year
- Reduction of infant and under 5 mortality by one third by 2000 and two thirds by 2015
- Reduction by half of severe and moderate malnutrition for children under five
- Reduction of the incidence of poverty by a half: 2015.

Education for All has become a world-wide movement for more than a hundred million children, most of whom are excluded from school by poverty and lack of parental and community support. In addition, there are millions more children who

may be physically in school for at least some of the time but are likely to drop out long before the end of the compulsory period of primary education. Many children come to school tired and hungry and are so malnourished that their ability to learn becomes affected. Some have untreated chronic eye, ear and chest infections which interfere with learning, others have mild but persistent learning difficulties or undetected sensory impairments which could be compensated by spectacles and hearing aids. More recently, millions of children who have or have been orphaned by HIV/AIDS have been added to the list of those who need to be included in this initiative. Millions more drop out of school because neither they nor their parents see schooling as relevant to their need to survive. Consequently, they remain at home to help with essential domestic tasks, including looking after younger children or animals or migrate from rural to urban areas in search of work. Many girls leave school for early marriage.

Disabled children were specifically if briefly included in the Jomtien Declaration as one of many groups of children to be included in EFA. Because the disability movement is no longer alone, it now needs to work in active partnership with this wider alliance while still ensuring that disabled children are not overlooked - as indeed they were after Jomtien. They already have natural allies in some of the major global children's organisations such as Save the Children and Action Aid who have not only included disabled children in their projects for a number of years but have also launched many programmes which focus specifically on their needs (eg, Jones, 2001; Stubbs, 2002).

The new Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons (2003-2012) has set additional targets, including:

- At least 75 per cent of children and youth with disabilities completing primary schooling by 2010
- All infants and young children with disabilities will have received early intervention services, with support for their families by 2012.
- 5 year enrolment targets to be set and monitored (Price, 2003).

EFA was initially concerned with enrolment and completion rates and with gender disparities because these indicators are readily understood and publicised (eg in *State of the World's Children*, UNICEF, 2003a). But the emphasis has now shifted from access to schools to access to a reformed curriculum, better methods of teaching and reform of teacher training. The World Summit on Children estimated that between 15 and 35 million new teachers were required to meet EFA targets, three million in Sub-Saharan Africa alone but there is little evidence that this challenge is being met or that the teacher training curriculum is being reformed along inclusive lines.

Low enrolment rates, high drop out and huge gender disparities cannot therefore be blamed on family poverty and ignorance. The school system is itself at fault in most countries, partly because governments fail to invest in the education of their children or the training of their teachers but mainly because the curriculum and the way it is taught fails to capture the interest of children or motivate them to learn and to participate. Reform of the school curriculum therefore lies at the heart of the inclusion movement, not only for disabled children but for all children.

There is a parallel here with the 'defect' and 'social' models of disability, the first seeing the problems as located largely within the child or family, the second emphasising how the environment has to change. As a first step towards the recognition of this 'paradigm shift', the government of Brazil is paying families to send and keep their child in school, in order to compensate them for the loss of income if their child was working.

World Education Forum: The Dakar Framework for Action (2000)

Ten years after Jomtien, the UN convened a follow-up meeting in Dakar to draw up a balance sheet of what had and had not been achieved. Although progress overall has been deeply disappointing, some positive outcomes can be celebrated. For example, the decline in school enrolments has been reversed (except in sub-Saharan Africa), there has been a slight reduction in the gender gap in primary education and 300 million fewer adults are unable to read or write.

Overall, however, the failure of so many governments to meet or even approach the Jomtien targets makes it difficult to avoid the conclusion that children and education are a low priority for these governments.

Most commentators agree that the disappointing progress recorded at Dakar cannot be simplistically blamed on lack of resources but also reflects low priority and lack of political will. Furthermore, some poor countries have nevertheless made a deliberate decision to invest in education - these include China, Cuba, Indonesia, Laos, Lesotho, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Uganda, Vietnam, Yemen and Zimbabwe, all of whom perform at a much higher level than would be expected on the basis of their income levels (Watkins, 2000). Most of these countries are prioritising inclusive education (UNESCO, 1999a, 1999b, 1999c, 2001a).

Early UN estimates indicated that it would cost 8 billion dollars to achieve Universal Primary Education and that donor countries would need to increase the proportion of their grants that go to education from two to eight per cent. This is the equivalent of four dollars for each tax payer in the donor countries.

Oxfam has provided some figures to put the figure of 8 billion dollars in perspective (Watkins, 2000). 8 billion dollars represents 4 days of military spending, half of what is spent on toys in the USA every year and less than Europeans spend on computer games or mineral water.

Speaking at the Jomtien conference, the President of Ecuador stated that the cost of a single nuclear submarine would finance the annual educational budget of 23 developing countries and meet the needs of 160 million school age children. Some countries (eg Pakistan, India) choose to spend up to six times more on armaments than on the education of their children. Other countries are crippled by the burden of debt repayments to international agencies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Furthermore, these agencies demanded 'structural readjustment programmes' which required governments to reduce expenditure on public services such as health and education and to privatise others. The cost of providing Universal Primary Education for the whole of Africa has been estimated as 3 billion dollars but the cost of debt repayment is over 13 billion dollars. Each man, woman and child in Zambia owes \$700 to debtors in rich countries. A mere ten per cent reduction in that

country's debt repayments would make it possible to eliminate school fees (Watkins, 2000).

Paradoxically, proportions of aid earmarked for education have actually fallen by 16 per cent during the 1990s, the USA cutting its education aid by 58 per cent, the UK by 39 per cent and France by 22 per cent (UNESCO, 2002). Some countries have expressed doubts about the commitment of governments to reform education systems and policies or complained that the infrastructure was too weak to ensure that money reached those for whom it was intended.

On the positive side, we are seeing a serious attempt on the part of a number of donor countries and agencies to reduce or even eliminate debt repayment, on condition that at least 80 per cent of the money thus saved is invested in the country's infrastructure, especially health and education. This programme and its variants (known as the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative or Fast-Track initiative) is welcome but has been heavily criticised for the slow speed of implementation.

Uganda was one of the first countries to benefit from debt relief and provides a powerful example of what can be done when a country impoverished first by civil war and then by HIV/AIDS decides to prioritise education as the way to the social and economic regeneration and health of the whole country (UNESCO, 2001b). Free primary education is guaranteed to four children in every family, with first priority going to disabled children and to girls. As a direct outcome of this policy, two million additional children have enrolled in school in two years, the net enrolment rate rising from 54 to 80 per cent. Public spending on education increased from 1.6 per cent of GDP in the early 1990s to almost 4 per cent in 2000 (Watkins, 2000). Targets for 2003 include 25,000 classrooms, water and sanitation for all schools, free textbooks for all primary age children and an extensive teacher education programme. The government freely admits the immense obstacles facing the implementation of these policies (UNESCO, 2001b; Arbeiter & Hartley, 2002) but a combination of political will and well-targeted donor support has already achieved a great deal. Over and above enrolment rates, a higher quality of education is planned.

Although the example of Uganda, is the most radical, it is clear that many other countries are moving towards inclusive practice in a variety of ways. In addition to the numerous reports published by UNESCO, mainly from income-poor countries, detailed reports have also been published by Save the Children (Miles, 2002a; Holdsworth, 2002 (on Lao PDR)) and the Atlas Alliance (eg Stubbs, 2002). (See also www.eenet.org.uk for many other country reports and summaries).

The Salamanca Declaration and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994)

As UNESCO and UNICEF began to monitor the impact of Jomtien, it became clear that although some governments were planning to reach targets for literacy and gender equality, very few were including disabled children within EFA. The Salamanca Conference was designed to redress the balance. It was hosted by UNESCO and the Spanish government and attended by representatives of 94 governments, UN agencies and many NGOs (UNESCO, 1994).

Salamanca significantly advanced the cause of inclusive education at several levels by reminding governments that disabled children must be included within EFA and providing examples from a range of countries on ways in which disabled children

could be fully included in ordinary schools. The conference explored the implications of inclusive education for the training of teachers and for working with parents, NGOs and community agencies. Above all, Salamanca recommended that governments should adopt the principle of inclusive education as a matter of policy or law, “enrolling all children in regular schools, unless there were compelling reasons for doing otherwise”.

The Salamanca conference seems to have had a positive impact on developments in a number of countries and at a variety of levels (UNESCO, 1999a). Some governments (including the United Kingdom) have explicitly committed themselves to implementing its recommendations. UNESCO’s Inclusive Education Division has launched a series of new programmes and initiatives and disseminated a great deal of information about the experiences of countries at all stages of development in moving towards more inclusive systems. It has also strengthened its teacher education programmes to focus more sharply on the education of children with disabilities in ordinary classrooms (UNESCO, 2001c).

UNESCO is undoubtedly the best source of information on developments and difficulties in moving towards inclusion. Two of its most recent programmes (Welcoming Schools and Inclusive Schools and Community Support Programmes) are reported to have resulted in pilot demonstration projects with inbuilt dissemination for sustainability; incorporation of innovations into national planning; changes in attitudes among policy makers, administrators and the local community; knowledge, skills and human resource development at national and provincial levels and enhanced managerial and leadership skills (UNESCO, 1999b, 1999c, 2001a).

UNESCO’s *Open File on Inclusive Education* (2001d) reflects a distillation of experience from many countries and takes the form of guidelines for planners and policy makers on moving towards more inclusive practice. Eight topics are discussed in some detail as particularly relevant in planning for a more inclusive educational system. These include managing the transition; professional development; assessment; organising support; families and communities; developing an inclusive curriculum; resourcing and funding; managing transitions throughout education; working with schools.

Since Dakar, UNESCO as a whole has been given a major monitoring mandate for EFA and has adopted inclusive education as a ‘flagship programme’ in order to ensure that the needs of disabled children are not once again overlooked or given a low priority.

UN Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993)

The Standard Rules represent one of the most powerful and influential initiatives taken by the United Nations. They are firmly based on the social model of disability and have a twin agenda of empowering disabled people and creating an accessible society by removing obstacles to their participation. Governments are held responsible for taking action. The Rules were developed under the auspices of the UN Disabled Persons Unit then based in Vienna by an ad hoc group consisting of representatives of both governments and the main disability international NGOs. They were approved by the UN General Assembly in December 1993. Currently, the Rules are being revised and a new Rapporteur is being appointed.

The Rules are basically a set of standards or quality indicators for a wide range of rights, needs and services relevant to disabled people of all ages, in all countries.

The 22 Rules cover education, employment, family life, personal integrity, culture, recreation, sports, religion, income maintenance and social security.

Rule 6 is concerned with education and is followed by nine further specific points of guidance:

“States should recognise the principle of equal primary, secondary and tertiary education for children, youth and adults with disabilities, in integrated settings. They should ensure that the education of persons with disabilities in an integral part of the education system” (UN 1993, p.23).

An important feature of the Rules is that they include an element of continuous monitoring carried out by the Special Rapporteur on Disability to the UN Secretary General. Until December 2002, this was Mr Bengt Lindqvist, a former Minister for Social Welfare in Sweden, and himself blind. He has been supported from the outset by a small expert committee consisting of two representatives of each of the main international disability NGOs: Disabled Persons International, Inclusion International, Rehabilitation International, World Blind Union, World Federation of the Deaf, World Federation of Psychiatric Users. Mr Lindqvist's position enables him to write to all Heads of State, asking specific questions concerning their legislation and provision for disabled people. He has made regular reports to the General Assembly of the UN and written personally to the Heads of State of the many countries that he has visited officially.

The Standard Rules have had a major impact at a number of levels. First, they have influenced the UN and its agencies in seeing disability as a human rights issue and in using the Rules to ensure that disabled persons are included in all aspects of the work of the agency. In particular, the rights of disabled children are now high on the agenda of the UN bodies monitoring the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as all other Conventions. In addition, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has developed a human rights based disability policy across all aspects of its work, not just in the section concerned with rehabilitation and development. Similarly, the Standard Rules underpin the Salamanca Framework and its follow up by UNESCO and UNICEF.

Secondly, follow up surveys by the Rapporteur suggests that the Rules have influenced many national governments in drawing up new legislation and setting up or strengthening national coordinating councils responsible to the Head of State. In their review of the impact of UN human rights initiatives on disabled people, Quinn and Degener (2002) report that 39 states in all regions of the world have adopted anti-discrimination legislation in the context of disability and that national governments are increasingly including information on disability in their reports to the UN bodies monitoring the implementation of UN Conventions. Thirdly, organisations of disabled people are much more centrally and powerfully involved in the process of policy development at both national and international levels, especially when they speak to government and the UN with a single voice.

Conclusions: from rights to reality

Turning rights into reality is a challenge for the UN but above all a responsibility for national governments. As we have seen, children are not a high priority for most governments and children with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to being overlooked and forgotten. Recent assessments raise fundamental questions about the impact of the whole range of UN initiatives on the day to day lives of disabled children and their families, especially in developing countries (Price, 2003).

In his final report to the UN, Bengt Lindqvist expressed his disappointment that the Rules have had relatively little impact in developing countries and in particular that there has not been more progress for children. In an earlier reference to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, he has stated that

“... when we relate the meaning of these principles to the actual situation of disabled children, we see, with shocking clarity, how far we are from complying with them” (Lindqvist, 1997)

Similarly, the introduction to UNESCO’s five year follow-up to Salamanca contains the following conclusion:

“The current Education for All strategies and programmes are largely insufficient or inappropriate with regard to the needs of children and youth with special needs. Where programmes targeting various marginalised/excluded groups do exist, they have functioned outside the mainstream - special programmes, specialised institutions, specialist educators. Notwithstanding the best intentions, it is conceded that too often the results have been exclusion: differentiation becoming a form of discrimination, leaving children with special needs outside the mainstream of school life and later, as adults, outside community social and cultural life in general.”

(UNESCO, 1999a, p.10)

Finally, Mary Robinson, then High Commissioner of the UN Commission on Human Rights, expressed the following view:

“Disabled people frequently live in deplorable conditions owing to the presence of social and physical barriers which prevent their integration and full participation in the community. Millions of children and adults world-wide are segregated and deprived of their rights and are, in effect, living on the margins. This is unacceptable”

(Robinson, 1998)

While no one would dispute that progress has been unacceptably slow and that the nature and quality of provision are often unsatisfactory, there is still evidence of a growing momentum in the world-wide movement towards the inclusion of children with disabilities in school and in their local community (Armstrong & Barton, 1999; Daniels & Garner, 1999; Mittler, 2000; Ainscow & Mittler, 2000; UNICEF, 2003b). There are now many published reports of the experience of countries successfully implementing inclusive policies, including many of the poorest and least developed

countries of the world. Furthermore, the experience of many countries across the world makes it possible to derive some general principles and guidelines which could improve the quality of provision in countries at different stages of development.

Despite disappointingly slow progress, conditions seem favourable for a more positive and determined effort to achieve universally agreed goals. The quotation at the head of this chapter from Heads of State taking part in the World Summit on Children in May 2002 represents an accountable commitment to include disabled children in developing provision in their country. The President of the World Bank has made a similar commitment to ensure that disabled children are included in all development aid programmes supported by the Bank (Wolfenson, 2002). These commitments are being followed up and monitored (eg Global Movement for Children, 2003). Furthermore, disability rights will become more prominent within the UN as a whole as a result of discussions designed to lead to a Convention on the Rights and Dignity of Disabled Persons.

Governments are now more accountable for their policy and practice and information about provision is more in the public domain and subject to open monitoring at many levels. This includes the UN itself, through its mechanisms for monitoring and publicising the implementation of the international Conventions. Similarly, NGOs have published information about the record of all governments in implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child in favour of disabled children (Jones, 2001). Because all governments are currently reviewing their Education for All targets, there are opportunities for parent and other advocacy organisation to remind them that disabled children must be included in all EFA initiatives.

Finally, parents of disabled children all over the world are demanding inclusive education for their children and putting pressure on governments to bring about the necessary reforms (Miles, 2002b). Experience in many countries has shown that organised and informed pressure from parents is irresistible and that change invariably follows.

Note:

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