

Muhammad Atif Sheikh from South Asian Disability Forum

Item 5

The global agenda for Sustainable Development 2030 cannot be achieved without ensuring Disability-inclusive development. By endorsing the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013–2022 governments in the region have expressed their commitments to promoting the rights of persons with disabilities and considerable initiatives have been recorded for the implementation of the Incheon Strategy to “Make the Right Real” for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific. SADF (South Asia Disability Forum) has been lobbying and advocating for governments in the region successfully and has been successful to raise the voices of persons with disabilities in parliaments by themselves. In Pakistan, a national committee has been formed under the leadership of the Federal Minister for Human Rights to implement the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Incheon Strategy, and a special committee on persons with disabilities was established under the leadership of the Speaker of the National Assembly.

Even after having all the political commitments and policy-level efforts, persons with disabilities in the region continue to face barriers in many aspects of life, including employment, participation in decision-making, accessibility, and education. The most common barriers reported are negative norms and a lack of understanding of disability from a social and rights-based perspective. Ableism is persistent in people’s subconsciousness dictating their behavior to sustain the negative perspective about persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities are still being considered as people with lesser capacities who need rehabilitation. They are still counted as passive recipients of charities and remain excluded from the development processes. Less than one percent of the entire workforce in the corporate sector in Pakistan are persons with disabilities. Since people with disabilities despite all measures of state and private sector. Persons with disabilities are not homogenous groups, the perspective of intersectionality is critically important for inclusive development and needs to be addressed in both disability-specific laws and mainstream laws. Ladies and gentlemen, I look forward to the forthcoming High-Level Intergovernmental Meeting on the Final Review of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities to be held in, Jakarta, in October 2022 for further and in-depth deliberations on the remaining challenges and set a course of the next ten years for us. For that, meaningful participation of persons is the key. Persons with disabilities in South Asia and beyond are looking forward to further partnership with ESCAP.