



## Asia-Europe People's Forum

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To achieve independence, have their choices respected, participate in the development and management of their needs, disabled people have to face to many barriers. In addition, everywhere in the world they meet the same “individual resistances” based on misguided perceptions of disability by many in society. The roots of these “individual resistances” are cultural and psychological and include an uneducated society’s fear of “catching” a disability and becoming ill, a fear of castration or even death for giving birth to a child with a disability, and other myths.

In addition to negative attitudes, negative reactions to the need for supports to enable movement, travel, communication, even getting up in the morning are added barriers to the full participation of persons with disabilities.

“Individual resistances” can also be based to some extent on the reality of the difficulty of living with a person with a disability if his or her needs are not met. For a person to live daily with mobility and/or communication restrictions is a challenge because what is a minor problem for a person without a disability can be a major, even traumatic issue for a person who has a disability. Living, working or playing with a person with a disability obliges one to be more attentive to the consequences of one’s gestures, pronunciation, the quality of one’s listening and the words one uses when speaking about or with persons with disabilities. Living and interacting with a person with a disability engages shared experiences and, in particular, fosters an understanding of differences among people and teaches a unique lesson about Human Rights and the consequences of Human Rights violations.

Perhaps the most sensitive issue that persons with disabilities sometimes face is the issue of people who genuinely want to help, but do so in a way that is more restricting to persons with disabilities than it is empowering. So often, persons with disabilities are discriminated against, not from any desire to exclude, but because people simply do not understand their disability-related needs and don’t identify their alternative potentials.

Negative attitudes based on false perceptions, exclusion based on lack of knowledge of disability and disability needs, and our right to be part of the democratic process make it critical for persons with disabilities to be supported to speak for ourselves. One must also note that persons with disabilities are experienced in finding solutions to problems that most people do not even face, so interacting with us can provide a unique opportunity to discuss alternative solutions to complex problems facing society. Democratically including persons with disabilities in all aspects of community participation can be a learning experience in implementing basic Human Rights.

For these reasons it is imperative that we seek to implement Article 4(3) of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Article 4(3) embodies the principle that people with disabilities fully participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives. It is through respect for the primacy of voice of people with disabilities, and the commitment that there be “nothing about us without us,” that true inclusion of people with disabilities in society can be achieved.