

HEAD OF PRESENCE'S REMARKS - DISABILITY CONFERENCE

11 June 2012

Ambassador Cannon,
Commissioner Baraku,
Mr. Lule,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Speaking as Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania, I am very pleased to be here with you this Monday morning starting a new week dedicated to the disabled.

Today's event celebrates the courage and commitment of young disabled people in establishing the Disabled Youth Forum, representing the interests of Albania's disabled youth.

I am deeply impressed by the progress made by the Forum in developing mission objectives and in planning project activities.

I would also like to commend the Forum's proactive approach in raising public awareness about the challenges faced by disabled young people, a public awareness which is so dearly needed.

Ensuring the full inclusion in society of disabled young people is also a question of human rights, and if I may add, of democracy. Ultimately, this is about building a better, truly democratic society, respectful of human rights of all its citizens.

Yet, and in short, disabled young people still face too many challenges when making their contributions to public life.

They face different problems in terms of physical barriers, like access to education, health care, and employment. Their participation in cultural and political life is also limited, which goes to the detriment of any advanced society.

They should be empowered to take full control of their own lives and, in a nutshell, realize their best human potential. And they deserve support.

This is why I would like to commend the Forum for their initiative and energy in this respect.

I know that they have many good ideas to address challenges they are facing. The Presence commends these high-minded efforts, led by civil society.

Which brings us neatly to today's event.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today's event is organized as part of the OSCE Presence project *Supporting the Disabled Youth Initiative in Albania*, in co-operation with the Disabled Youth Forum, the British

Council Albania and the Vodafone Foundation, under the framework of Promotion Inclusion Week.

I would like to express my warmest appreciation to the British Embassy in Tirana, the British Council Albania and Vodafone Foundation Albania for their continued support.

Our close co-operation started in 2010 as part of an OSCE Presence project aimed at strengthening the Albanian National Council for People with Disabilities.

The OSCE Presence has consistently worked to bring into focus the question of participation of disabled people in decision-making as well as the need to establish stronger dialogue between civil society and government.

This is why we have been steadfast in supporting the disability movement and assisted in the development of the National Strategy of People with Disabilities.

Since the Strategy's adoption in 2005, we have seen some positive developments, such as the establishment of the National Council on People with Disabilities.

The Government at the time placed on record its commitment to raising the profile and the voice of people with disabilities in decision making.

Nonetheless, the truth is that the Council has met since on a few occasions.

So there is clearly a need to further strengthen the National Council, as a functioning model for co-operation between state and civil society, which can contribute to the full inclusion of disabled people in public life.

The Disability Youth Forum can play a leading role in this process, raising the representation of the disabled youth and facilitating their integration into society.

I look forward to hearing about its ideas and plans for the future.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to conclude by thanking all the gathered for their appreciated participation. I wish you a successful and productive day.

Thank you very much.

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