



DISABLED PEOPLES' INTERNATIONAL

North America and the Caribbean Region

Strategic Plan 2004–2006

MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIRPERSON

On behalf of the Regional Council and my colleagues in the National Assemblies of the North America and the Caribbean, I am pleased to present our region's (DPI) Action Plan for 2004–2006. This plan is ambitious and will set the future directions for the region. With this plan, the North America and the Caribbean region can embark on a journey of growth and development.

We have seen many changes around the world and in our region since DPI was created. Yet in our countries, people with disabilities still cannot participate actively in the community by working in an office, or going to school. Modifications in buildings, colleges, parks, museums, or even transportation can help to facilitate the access of disabled people. WE know we have much to do and DPI is not going to give up until people with disabilities have a place in society and our rights are being exercised. WE also humans and because of that, we deserve the privilege to be heard and seen.

I would like to thank our regional council, all of our colleagues and our friends for the effort you have made in order to encourage human rights for disabled people.

Today we are sharing a vision. With our combined efforts and our action plan to guide us, let us bring our vision into reality.

Mary Mitchell

Regional Chairperson

North America and the Caribbean Region

Foundations

Our Mandate

Our Region is a network of 14 national organizations or assemblies of disabled people, established to promote the human rights of disabled people through full participation, equalization of opportunity and development.

Our Goals

- Promote the human rights of disabled persons;
- Promote economic and social integration of disabled persons;
- Develop and support organizations of disabled persons within our region and share information and knowledge with others at the world level.

VOX NOSTRA - A Voice of Our Own

Preamble to the DPI Constitution

Whereas universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice; and

Whereas conditions exist involving injustice, hardship, and privation to large numbers of people with physical, sensory, and mental impairments; and

Whereas such persons have a right to full participation and equality, meaning the right of every disabled person to share in the social life of the community in which he or she lives and enjoy living conditions equal to those of other citizens, including an equal share in the improvement in standard of living resulting from social and economic development; and

Whereas disability has too long been viewed as a problem of the individual and not the relationship between an individual and his/her environment, it is necessary to distinguish between:

- a) Disability is the functional limitation within the individual caused by physical, mental, or sensory impairment, and

- b) Handicap is the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical or social barriers

Whereas rehabilitation is a process aimed at enabling a person to reach an optimum physical, mental, and/or social functioning level in order to provide that person with the tools to direct his/her own life, independent living and community services are not and should not be part of the process; and

Whereas all systems must be open to disabled people, it is affirmed that:

- There are many barriers to the full participation of disabled people;
- Removing these barriers will require structural changes in our society;
- There is an obligation to make the physical environment, housing, transportation, social and health services, education and work opportunities, cultural and social life (e.g. sports, recreational facilities) accessible to all;
- Governments have a duty to ensure that the benefits of reform and development programs in every field also reach disabled citizens. Special measures to effect this should be incorporated into governments' planning process and administrative structures; and

Whereas the United Nations has recognized the rights of disabled people through the Resolutions: Universal Declaration of Human Rights, The International Covenants on Human Rights, Declaration of the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons, Declaration of the Rights of Disabled Persons; and

Whereas the social and economic conditions of disabled people in underdeveloped and developing countries are recognized as meriting special and urgent attention the parties to this document moved by sentiments of justice, humanity and peace and with a view to attaining the objectives set forth in this preamble, agree to the following constitution of Disabled Peoples' International

An Overview of DPI

Established in 1981, Disabled Peoples' International (DPI) is a global organization, headquartered in Canada, with National Assemblies in 135 countries, operating regional offices in Africa, Asia/Pacific, Europe, Latin America, and **North America and the Caribbean**, working in English, French and Spanish. Any organization controlled by disabled people can be a member of the National Assembly of that country. Eighty percent of DPI's National Assemblies are in developing countries.

In recognition of DPI as an international authority on disability, the UN conferred on the organization Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) in 1981.

A major goal of Disabled Peoples' International is the full participation of all disabled people in the mainstream of life, particularly those in developing countries who make up the vast

majority of the world's 600 million disabled people. DPI recognizes that poverty not only leads to disability, but also allows few concessions for the needs and aspirations of disabled people. In many rural areas, where up to 80 per cent of the general population lives, disability prevention and rehabilitation are rare. People with disabilities are often rejected or hidden away as an evil family secret. Hence, DPI's goal of full participation is a goal of gigantic proportions, but one that has already been proven possible.

Through its self-help development programs and projects worldwide, DPI has sought, and achieved, a considerable increase in the participation of disabled people in their own social and economic development, as well as in that of their home countries.

DPI works through building consensus on issues; it achieves this by gathering together to discuss these issues at various levels. At the local and regional levels, the National Assemblies meet annually to identify regional priorities. At the international level, the DPI World Council, made up of six representatives from each region, meet every two years to discuss disability in a global context. Our largest gatherings are our World Assemblies, which are held every four years. At our most recent Assembly, held in Sapporo Japan, 3700 delegates from 109 countries came together to create the Sapporo Platform to guide our collective actions with respect to certain themes that affect the global disability community.

Sapporo Declaration and Platform

Disabled Peoples' International Sixth World Assembly took place from October 15–18, 2002 in Sapporo, Japan. The goal of the event was to provide the international disability community with the opportunity for sharing and discussing lessons learned as well as to set the stage to strengthen our strategic position towards the full participation and integration of people with disabilities in society in the 21st century. Our World Assembly brought together 3700 people with disabilities from around the globe. Through workshops, each participant had the opportunity to share personal insights and build new connections with disability activists from around the world. Most importantly, this gathering established the agenda for global disability issues in the next four years. Our Sapporo Declaration, Platform and workshop resolutions make up this agenda.

Sapporo Declaration

In 1981 at the First World Congress in Singapore, disabled people recognized that we must unite and we must fight for our rights. Today in 2002 we are united, and we stand together as never before. We have national assemblies in some 135 countries in every continent of the world. We are ready to fight for our rights!

In Sapporo, our largest gathering yet, more than 3,000 people from some 109 countries have heard presentations and debated issues; we recognize that much has been achieved since our inception in 1981; we also recognize that much remains to be achieved. According to the United Nations statistics, there are 600 million disabled people worldwide, 82% live in developing countries. Unlike other citizens of their societies, disabled people live in the most deplorable

conditions, isolated and excluded from their communities by barriers of policy, environment and attitude. For this reason, we fight against wars, poverty and the eradication of all forms of discriminations especially against disabled persons.

Disabled people are unquestionably the largest and most discriminated minority group in the world whose human rights are systematically violated. These violations against the poorest of the poor result in worsening living conditions, degrading inhuman treatment, lack of adequate housing, healthcare, education, employment, social inclusion and, often face death. Our rights under existing UN conventions are generally ignored or marginalized in monitoring procedures.

Therefore:

- *We demand a specific international human rights convention that is reflective of the full range of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and that includes a strong convention-monitoring mechanism informed by the unique perspective of people with disabilities to ensure the credibility, legitimacy and efficacy of the convention;*
- *Disabled people demand a voice of our own in the development of this instrument. We must be consulted at all levels on all matters that concern us.*
- *We request the UN Secretary-General to continue to provide facilities necessary for the development of an International Human Rights Convention for disabled people and to re-allocate resources to support the work of the United Nations Program on Disabilities;*
- *We urge all UN member states to support the formulation and adoption of this convention and to establish a Voluntary Fund to support the participation of disabled people, in particular from developing countries;*
- *We encourage all disabled people and their organizations to educate the public and their political representatives on the need and benefits of a convention.*

In addition:

- *We demand that every country adopt and implement anti-discrimination legislation and policies that ensures the equalization of opportunity for disabled people.*

Sapporo Platform

A DPI call to disabled people throughout the world:

Peace

As disabled people we are opposed to wars, violence and all forms of oppression. Daily, men, women and children are being disabled by land and personnel mines, and forms of armed destruction and torture. We must work for a world where all people can live in peace and express their diversity and their desires.

A Strong Voice of Our Own

Disabled Peoples' International must continue to grow in strength and voice. We are the experts regarding our situation, and we must be consulted at all levels, on all initiatives concerning us. If we are to achieve a strong voice, we must be united in our work; we must build a strong organization. We must share our knowledge, our experiences, and our resources, and encourage youth leadership. We must use technology as a vehicle to communicate, to discuss, and to promote issues and concerns.

Human Rights

As a human rights organization, we must seek support for a convention that will protect and respect our human rights. We must be educated, and, in turn, educate civil society, and government at all levels. We must learn from the strategies and successes of others, such as landmines survivors and women. Our rights are violated on a daily basis; we must continue to gather the evidence.

Diversity Within

In our work, our organization at all levels must ensure the inclusion of women, youth, and other minorities. We must ensure participation through equality of language. We must strive to uphold our commitment to our official languages: French, Spanish, English, and sign language. We are a cross disability organization, so we must ensure that all materials are available in alternate formats.

Bioethics

We must become part of the discussions on genetics and bioethics. We must assert our right to be different. We must repudiate any discussion that links the concept of "person" to a set of abilities. We must promote disability studies to change the image of disability in a positive way among academics.

Independent Living

Self-determination and independent living is fundamental to our human rights. We must undertake a program of education of people with disabilities and civil society on the concept of independent living. We must consider our cultural differences in adapting independent living in some countries.

Inclusive Education

Full participation starts in childhood in the classroom, in play areas, and in programs and services. When children with disabilities sit side by side with other children, our communities are enriched by the awareness and acceptance of all children. We must urge governments throughout the world to eradicate segregated education, and to establish an inclusive education policy.

International Development

International Development organizations must evaluate their policies, programs and services to ensure the inclusion of disabled people. We must encourage the governments that financially support these agencies to include specific policies that ensure the full participation of disabled people, by the provision of accessible and appropriate service delivery. This site has been created to show our daily work for the recognition of human rights and inclusion of people with disabilities into the mainstream of society. It contains information on our membership and activities within the Caribbean, USA and Canada.

Strategic Direction 1

Reestablishment of our Regional Office

Strategic Goal:

To provide a strong unified voice, to articulate issues, and administer activities to achieve the human rights of people with disabilities in the North America and the Caribbean Region.

“A voice of our own” is our motto, and as we begin to negotiate a UN convention on the human rights of people with disabilities, strength and unity in our voice is more important than ever before. While we are a part of a greater world movement in the convention process, we have the network, the desire and the capacity to ensure that disabled people have an opportunity to participate in the development of this instrument.

Our regional network is our strength, with 14 national assemblies and 1 associate member reporting to a regional council, ensuring their capacity to be a conduit of information from the country to the region to the international stage. As a vehicle, it ensures national assemblies issues and concerns are brought forward for international attention.

“We must ensure and improve information dissemination at all levels, in particular the rural areas in which the majority of people with disabilities live”¹

Our regional organizations in the Caribbean are often poor in financial resources and this hampers their ability to be effective in generating tools to facilitate a united approach to affect social and political change. Our challenge is to design training that builds sustainability and leadership of the region. We must utilize all sectors and become more diverse through the involvement of youth, women and other under-represented groups.

“We recommend the development of a clear succession plan involving young people with disabilities within DPI with mentoring responsibilities from senior Regional Council leaders”²

Stewardship of the organization is important to ensure the legacy of our accomplishments continues to be founded on good governance. DPI leadership and management practices must adapt and change to meet the needs and challenges of the membership as well organizational operations.

To strengthen our region we must develop a diversified funding base. Establishing a range of partnerships to fund our activities will give DPI the flexibility to meet the diverse scope of organizational and developmental activities in the region.

¹ Resolution from Sapporo Workshop on Development in Rural Areas & Organizational Development

² Resolution from Sapporo Workshop on Capacity Building

Activities

1. Hire a qualified Regional Development Officer who has the skills, experience, attitude and ability to provide the management and direction for the region.
2. Identify and establish a work plan with clear deadlines and outcomes for the Regional Development Officer.
3. Establish a regional office by identifying a suitable and accessible location and acquire the necessary furnishings, technology and fittings to meet the needs of the Regional Council, National Assemblies, RDO and staff.
4. Develop and implement a fundraising strategy that will ensure a diversified funding base for the sustainability of the region.
5. Seek partnerships and alliances with key stakeholders in the region such as CARICOM, the Caribbean Development Bank, and other development agencies who seek the development of the Caribbean region.
6. Develop fundraising strategies for organizational and regional activities to be shared in capacity building programs.

Strategic Direction 2

Communications

Communications is an integral part of the governance and management of DPI. We must achieve a high level of transparency in our activities and communicate effectively with all of our stakeholders. The region aims to keep its Regional Council, national assemblies, funders and other stakeholders up-to-date on its activities and to be open to a dialogue with them. To this end, DPI issues a series of publications on its position related to disability issues, strategies for change, policies and procedures, and regularly updates its website.

Effective communications are essential if we are to learn from each other's work, experience and resources. Technology can bridge this divide. However, many national assemblies have no access to the simplest of technology.

We must consider how Internet-based technology can build capacity for rapid access to information and inform the public of our issues and concerns. We must place particular emphasis on the development of long-term professional networks within and across our region. These networks are intended to share locally created materials and expertise with counterparts for policy dialogue, professional development and information exchange.

As the disability movement has evolved and shifted from a development focus to one based on human rights, the importance of awareness, as a means of influencing and changing behaviour of

Strategic Goal:

To ensure effective communications within the region and to use every opportunity to seek publicity and awareness to change negative images of disabled people so that future generations will accept disabled people as equal participants in our society.

civil society and eventually governments and policy makers cannot be overstated. Education and sharing our stories are the first steps in changing how others view disabled people, which will lead to greater support of our fight for our rightful place in society.

Public Awareness

Our issues are many – income generation, education, impact of poverty, etc. We must educate civil society as well as our political representatives on our concerns. We must use every opportunity to seek publicity and awareness. We must seek to change negative images of disabled people so that future generations will accept disabled people as equal participants in our society.³

Negative images and stereotypes are also fought through personal interaction, getting to know each other as friends and neighbors. People only seem "strange" when they are strangers; when we work together, go to the same schools, attend the same churches, and serve in the same community organizations, we recognize all that we have in common. Whether we can see or hear or walk or talk the same way, becomes less important than the fact that we share the same interests, ideas, and values.⁴

³ Sapporo Platform Theme: Public Awareness

⁴ Justin Dart in Disability Awareness Guide

DPI will seek new ways for our work to be noticed and our voices to be heard. At every opportunity, we must promote the work of the national assemblies and the disability movement in general. DPI will increase awareness by bringing disability related topics into mainstream issues. For instance, DPI will collaborate with mainstream women's groups to include disability as an agenda item.

Activities

1. Establish a website to share the work, experiences and resources of the region and as a means to promote the work and best practices of the region
2. Develop and maintain a directory of national assemblies.
3. Design, develop and implement a regular update of information received from the headquarters office.
4. Publish a bi-monthly internal newsletter to reflect the work of the region.
5. Develop a regional campaign to reach governments in the Caribbean countries to improve accessible facilities.

"We encourage all disabled people and their organizations to educate the public and their political representatives (on the need and benefits of a convention)"⁵

6. Assist national assemblies to find the technologies necessary to become connected.
7. Create PR materials to keep various audiences such as mainstream media informed of developments.
8. Participate in mainstream international events to increase visibility and encourage the involvement of persons with disabilities.
9. Ensure all materials are available in alternate formats such as large print, Braille and cassette.

⁵ Excerpt from Sapporo Declaration

Strategic Direction 3

UN Convention

Strategic Goal:

To achieve a UN Convention that is human rights based and reflects the voice and wishes of disabled people worldwide.

supervision of the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva”⁷

As a human rights organization, we must seek support for a convention that will protect and respect our human rights. We must be educated, and, in turn, educate civil society and government at all levels. We must learn from the strategies and successes of others, such as landmines survivors and women. Our rights are violated on a daily basis; we must continue to gather the evidence.

Inclusion and equality still evade disabled people worldwide and this is reflected in the Report of the Secretary General December 2002: *“There is a growing recognition that the empowered participation of persons with disabilities is required to bring about the World Programme of Action goals of full participation and equality.”⁶*

“We recommend that DPI develop strategies and action plans which National Assemblies can use to work with their governments and ensure participation of the disabled community in delegations to the UN Ad Hoc Committee and that the Ad Hoc Committee ensure that the future Convention on Disability be firmly placed within the mainstream human rights system of the UN and that the drafting process take place under the

“We believe that the U.N. must effectively monitor governments that have signed conventions on human rights for violations and enforcement and through UN ambassadors, pressure those nations that have not yet signed to agree with the articles of human rights”⁸

DPI must take a leadership role at the negotiations table for a convention to make certain that any international anti-discrimination treaty is credible, legitimate, and effective through the participation of disabled people. To this end and in response to a report (2002) from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights observing: *“...the relative lack of engagement of disability NGOs with the treaty monitoring machinery...”⁹* we must become experts in international human rights law and all auxiliary instruments.

“We must have human rights training programs to train persons with disabilities across the world on human rights”¹⁰

Although our rights are protected implicitly in international treaties, the reality for the majority of disabled people is that we still suffer from prejudice, discrimination and

⁶ Review and appraisal of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons.

⁷ Resolution from Sapporo Workshop on Human Rights: UN Instruments & How to Use Them

⁸ Resolution from Sapporo Workshop on Human Rights: Gathering Evidence

⁹ Human Rights and Disability: The current use and future potential of United Nations human rights instruments in the context of disability (2002), UNHCHR

¹⁰ Resolution from Sapporo Workshop on Human Rights: UN Instrument & How to Use Them

intolerance that would be completely unacceptable for any other minority. DPI must gather evidence of human rights violations against disabled people. Monitoring and documentation will give solid proof of our daily struggles and place pressure on international monitoring bodies to be more effective with violators and will support our call for a UN convention specific to our unique issues.

- Educate and promote disability community.
- Public education of civil society
- DPOC – collaboration

“We demand that governments create anti-discriminatory laws and take actions to ensure the full enjoyment of economic, social, cultural, and political rights of persons with disabilities”¹¹

Activities

1. Develop regional resources so that each national assembly will be ready to meet with their government
 - Seek support and resources
2. Utilize resources such as the DPI and UN website to educate ourselves, governments and civil society
3. Develop a regional declaration based on the DPI Sapporo declaration
4. Network with others working on the issue to promote the regional position
 - NGO local/regional
 - develop a Caribbean perspective and post to website

¹¹ Resolution from Sapporo Workshop on Human Rights: National Action by DPI

Strategic Direction 4

Community Based Rehabilitation

Strategic Goal:

To ensure CBR is implemented through the combined efforts of people with disabilities themselves, their families and communities; and development of services that promote equalization of opportunities and social inclusion of all children and adults with disabilities.

Community-based rehabilitation (CBR) is a sectoral strategy within community development for the rehabilitation, equalization of opportunities and social integration of people with disabilities. CBR is implemented through the combined efforts of community stakeholders with the active participation of disabled people themselves, their families and communities, to facilitate their access to appropriate health, education, social, vocational and other services. (Agreed to in 1994 by ILO, UNESCO and WHO).

DPI recognizes that CBR has resulted in positive change in the lives of disabled people in many countries. It is difficult to generalize our evaluation of CBR without a detailed review region by region.

The community-based approach is particularly appropriate for the prevention of disability, early identification and intervention of children with disabilities. Community based approach usually means that many sectors of the community –one of which is disabled people - will identify programming to meet the need.

If our goal is full participation then disabled persons must be in control of decision making in all aspects that affect their lives. CBR, in most instances, does not ensure that disabled persons are the decision makers in their own lives, rather community based decisions result in housing, transportation, education and employment that take away the ability of disabled person to make their own decisions and choices.

Poor families' priorities may be at the level of survival needs, rather than solving the problems of a disabled family member. In other cases families may have hidden away their disabled family member. In either situation the person with the disability may go unnoticed or unheard, unless specific actions are taken to ensure that the voices of disabled people are heard.

DPI asserts that CBR must change to reflect a human rights approach and be modeled on the independent living concept. By its very nature of being a community based decision making model – people with disabilities do not have a voice of their own in matter that affect their lives.

Some of our national assembly's report that CBR is still medically oriented, not considering the human rights, social and economic needs of individual disabled persons. In other instances, regions report that even when their input is requested, their opinions are not equally weighted to that of professionals. Worst, there were instances when disabled peoples' ideas were totally disregarded. Their input therefore is meaningless.

Activities

1. Develop a regional strategy and resource to assist national assemblies to lobby government to support CBR.
2. Share experiences on CBR and post to the regional website.
3. Work with local governments to sponsor equipment.
4. Identify scholarships for persons with disabilities.
5. Establish partnership links in health education.

Strategic Direction 5

Women & Youth

Strategic Goal:

To ensure the full participation within DPI at all levels under represented groups such as women, youth and indigenous peoples.

As an international organization devoted to the social and economic inclusion of all persons with disabilities, DPI must set an example for promoting the participation of every segment of our global family. DPI North America and the Caribbean region must reach out to and create opportunities for women, and youth with disabilities to be heard, have their issues known and become active in our movement.

“We recommend that DPI recognize and address the multiple issues for women with disabilities, many of which are hidden in families, local communities and need to be spoken publicly, particularly in areas of sexual education, gender discrimination, sexual abuse, and child bearing and rearing”¹²

Youth represent the future of the disability movement and yet we know very little about their priority issues. Young men and women with disabilities have the energy and drive to take up our cause but they need to be included in our discussions and feel that they too have a role to play in the organization. The region must create an environment that fosters exchange with disabled youth to share their opinions and vision for the future. Current leadership must reach out to youth and help guide new leaders. Mentorship of disabled youth will give the necessary skills and experience to the next generation to continue our fight.

We must recognize that in addition to discrimination based on disability, women, and youth with disabilities face further marginalization due to gender, age and ethnicity. The region must take concrete steps to ensure equality within our movement.

Women represent half the population and yet only account for a small fraction of the leaders in the region.

Disabled women’s issues into mainstream women’s rights will raise the profile and awareness of disability alongside topics such as education, childcare and violence.

¹² Resolution from Sapporo Workshop on Disabled Women: Human Rights

Activities

Women

1. Reorganize regional committee and Identify programs, activities and resources to assist women's committees of national assemblies.
2. Each National Assembly to develop a committee of their own with representation of women from all cultural sectors.
3. Develop a section of the website devoted to the issues of women including a chat and bulletin board.
4. Develop and disseminate a Bibliography on women's issues in the region.
5. Participate in World Summit in Canada and represent women in our region

"We recommend that DPI set up an active committee to enhance inclusive education of children with disabilities through lobbying and advocacy"¹³

Youth

1. Recognize the abilities of youth and encourage their leadership to give them **a voice of their own.**
2. Identify a resource person to support youth with disabilities

¹³ Resolution from Sapporo Workshop on Disabled Children: Inclusive Education

3. Develop a transition program to employment
 - Get the information to young people
 - Antigua Advocacy group – develop a similar one in each N/A
 - Host a camp or a day
 - Sports

"We must cultivate an environment to nurture more people to become leaders to actively promote our movement. There is a need for leadership training, especially of youth and women, to cover all countries and go beyond national borders"¹⁴

¹⁴ Resolution from Sapporo Workshop on Capacity Building: Future Leaders say,