



3 December 2024

## **Christian Conference of Asia's Statement on International Day of Persons with Disabilities – 2024**

The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) joins the global community in observing the International Day of Persons with Disabilities 2024, centred on the theme 'Amplifying the Leadership of Persons with Disabilities for an Inclusive and Sustainable Future'. This theme reminds us of the essential role that persons with disabilities must play in all efforts towards sustainable development, with their voices and leadership driving meaningful change; their inclusion is vital as we aim to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

Today, approximately 700 million people in the Asia-Pacific region live with disabilities, a number that is expected to rise due to ageing populations, chronic health conditions, and climate-related challenges. These factors disproportionately affect persons with disabilities, making them more vulnerable to the adverse consequences of environmental changes and social instability. They face heightened risks of marginalisation, with many living in poverty and experiencing greater levels of food insecurity and malnutrition compared to non-disabled populations.

The exclusion of persons with disabilities from social opportunities only intensifies these struggles. In many countries across the region, fewer than 5% of children with disabilities are enrolled in formal education, leaving them without the essential tools for personal and social development. This lack of access to education not only limits their future employment prospects but also perpetuates cycles of poverty and social isolation.

Moreover, women and girls with disabilities experience compounded discrimination, facing both gender-based and disability-based prejudice. This double burden results in even fewer opportunities for education, employment, and social participation, further entrenching their vulnerability and marginalisation. These intersecting challenges highlight the urgent need for systemic change to ensure that persons with disabilities—especially women and children—are fully included in all aspects of society. Without concerted efforts to break down barriers to education, employment, healthcare, and social inclusion, the prospects for an inclusive and sustainable future remain distant for millions of people with disabilities in the region.

Across various facets of life, persons with disabilities encounter ableism, stigma, and discrimination, which affect both physical and mental health. In the health sector, this can manifest through harmful practices such as forced sterilisation, involuntary treatment, and institutionalisation, often exacerbated by laws and policies that limit their rights to make their own decisions. Additionally, cultural beliefs in some parts of Asia, which associate disability with past misdeeds, fuel discrimination and, in some cases, family shame.

As we reflect on this year's theme, the CCA encourages its constituencies to examine the inclusivity of programmes and practices. Are persons with disabilities welcomed in our worship services, events, and activities? The CCA urges member churches and councils to make conscious efforts to ensure that people with disabilities can participate fully in church life, finding inspiration in the example of Jesus, who showed compassion and advocated for the equal treatment of all individuals.

Let us commit to building a community where everyone is valued, respected, and included. May we, like the friends of the paralysed man in Mark 2:1-12, take active steps toward holistic healing—of spirit, mind, body, and soul—and ensure that all people are embraced within our churches and society. Let us strive to create spaces where no one is left behind, and all can experience the fullness of dignity, belonging, and love.

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