



Position Paper on Definition of Disability

Purpose

For many years, Disabled Peoples' International (DPI), along with many of the other major international non-governmental organizations (INGO) have not adopted a definition of disability. This has been due to many circumstances, including but not restricted to:

- Many different definitions used in legislation in different countries
- Most definitions in use were medical definitions
- Problems with translations of different definitions
- Acceptance in some countries of terms which were rejected by other countries
- The International Classification of Impairment, Disability and Handicap

All of the above, and much more besides, left the International NGO's, including DPI, wondering what was the best way forward. Indeed, many of the NGO's left it to its National Member Organizations as to which way they approached the definition used. Indeed, from studies done in some countries, there can be any number of definitions used for different legislation. This is particularly so for definitions of disability used for Welfare Payments as against Educational, Training or Employment definitions.

The World Health Organization (WHO) began a process in the mid 1990's of examining their International Classification of Impairment, Disability and Handicap (ICIDH) and Rachel Hurst represented DPI in this review. The final document is the International Classification of Functioning (ICF), which takes a very strong approach to the social model of disability as against the medical model previously used.

DPI has found itself requested on numerous occasions on what definition of disability they would like to see used. These requests come from member organizations as well as other organizations that support our Human Rights based approach to disability. Up to now we have not had a working definition that we can pass on to these people. However, within the new ICF the definition of disability that is used can, I propose, be utilised for our purposes.

The International Classification of Functioning (ICF) defines disability as the outcome of the interaction between a person with an impairment and the environmental and attitudinal barriers he/she may face.

This, I propose, could be utilised for the moment as our preferred definition with the hope that we can have an improved definition when time on our World Council allows for a debate on this issue.

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