

Indian Minister Promises Commitment to Empower Persons with Disabilities

Union Minister of Social Justice & Empowerment of India Shri Thaawarchand Gehlot headed the country's delegation to attend the High Level Inter-Governmental Mid-point Review Meeting of Asia and Pacific Decade for Persons with Disabilities, 2013-2022 in Beijing from 27th November to 1st December, 2017. The delegation includes Secretary of the Department and other senior officers. This meeting is being organized by United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) in cooperation with Government of China.

2. The main objective of the meeting is to review the progress made by the member States during the decade at the mid-point in 2017 with regard to Incheon Strategy 'to make the right real' for persons with disabilities in Asia and Pacific. Incheon Strategy has been adopted to achieve the goals mentioned in UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Another objective of the meeting is to discuss the future policy action for building disabilities-inclusive societies in the region, bearing in mind the synergies between the Incheon Strategy and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

3. The Union Minister, while making India's statement at the Mid-Point Review Meeting, stated that India is committed to the principle of unity in diversity and the goal of inclusive development encompassing all segments of society including persons with disabilities. He invoked provisions of Indian Constitution which guarantees freedom, justice and equality to all individuals. He mentioned that India has enacted a new law namely 'Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016' in line with the provisions of UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The law guarantees a number of rights and entitlements such as right to equality and non-discrimination, community life, protection from violence and inhuman treatment, access to justice, home and family and reproductive rights. It mandates the provincial Governments to take appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy their rights equally with others. Some of the important affirmative actions under the said law include four per cent reservation in Government-aided higher educational institutes and five per cent reservation in poverty alleviation schemes and allotment of land for housing, setting up of business at concessional rate of interest, etc.

4. He also mentioned that Hon'ble Prime Minister of India has coined the word "Divyangjan", i.e., "Persons with Divine Abilities" to address "Persons with Disabilities". Use of the word "Divyangjan" aims at uplifting societal status, promoting non-discrimination and instilling a positive attitude about their lives and capabilities in the society.

5. He also spoke about Accessible India Campaign which is a flagship programme launched to create barrier-free environment for persons with

disabilities. The campaign targets creation of physical and virtual infrastructure truly accessible to and inclusive of the persons with disabilities, and making public buildings, transport system and information and communication technologies accessible on a wide scale. The Government is pursuing the programme with the States so as to achieve the target within a given timeframe.

6. He stated that India remains committed to building an enabling environment for the persons with disabilities, to enable them to enjoy their rights equally with others, and to realize their full potential. We are open to sharing best practices and international cooperation for empowerment and inclusion of persons with disabilities.

7. He urged the member States to utilize this opportunity of mid-point review of the Asia Pacific Decade for persons with disabilities and come out with practicable National and Regional action plans to achieve the goal of inclusion of persons with disabilities in the mainstream society. India would stand with the efforts made in this regard.

8. In conclusion, the Indian Minister said that he is looking forward to finalization of Beijing Declaration which will pave the way for better implementation to achieve empowerment and inclusion of persons with disabilities.
