



Christian Conference of Asia

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CCA's Statement on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD)–2021 “Leadership and participation of persons with disabilities towards an inclusive, accessible, and sustainable post-COVID-19 world”

The International Day of Persons with Disabilities falls on 3 December each year. In a world where the challenges for persons with disabilities continue to increase, we must acknowledge harsh realities such as the limitations related to restrictions of movement, interaction, and physical support. As we reflect on the theme of this year's IDPD, “Leadership and participation of persons with disabilities toward an inclusive, accessible, and sustainable post-COVID-19 world”, we are reminded once again of the need to be concerned about people with disabilities in our midst.

Almost 60 percent of the world's 650 million persons with disabilities live in Asia and the Pacific according to United Nations (UN) estimates. This translates into some 400 million persons with disabilities in our region who need to be empowered to fully realise their dignity and rights. Poverty and marginalisation characterise the situation of the majority of persons with disabilities in the region. In countries that are experiencing fast-paced globalisation, which brings with it tougher competition and higher levels of stress, the number of persons with psycho-social disabilities is on the rise. Conflicts and natural disasters have also contributed to the increase. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), one of the five regional commissions of the UN, considers persons with disabilities to be “among the poorest of the poor and the most marginalised in the society”.

The COVID-19 pandemic has put the spotlight on the various challenges in access to treatment, care, and support services for persons with disabilities. They continue to face barriers in their participation as equal members of society. Even online systems of interaction, or virtual spaces, continue to be inaccessible to many of them. In the post-COVID-19 world, there is a need to systematise all form of interactive methods to include persons with disabilities. Additionally, healthcare facilities must incorporate service home-delivery systems. Preventive measures also require to be accessible at homes and place of residences.

It must be said that in many contexts, Asian churches also have not adequately recognised persons with disabilities in their congregations or communities. They continue to face isolation from friends and family members, as well as other members of their communities. Such exclusion even isolates them from active involvement and leadership in the spiritual life of the Church, which should be a caring and inclusive community. Persons with disabilities are unable to even physically enter church buildings or church-related institutions in most Asian countries because many church buildings lack disability-friendly infrastructure.

On this day, the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) encourages its member councils and churches to be mindful of and concerned about the special needs of people with disabilities. It is the responsibility of churches and members of each congregation to uphold the dignity and rights of the persons with disabilities and recognise them as children of God as well as to work for the implementation of rights-based approaches in services for them. With the leadership and participation of persons with disabilities in our congregations and communities, Asian churches are called to mobilise, sensitise, be engaged with, listen to, and learn from the experiences of persons with disabilities as well as from their creativity, which should be used to advocate for their rights, to create more inclusive environments, and thus to ensure the full participation of people with disabilities in the journey towards an inclusive, accessible, and sustainable post-COVID-19 world.

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