

## DECLARATION

### “TOWARDS A STRATEGY FOR THE EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL INCLUSION OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS WITH DISABILITIES”

#### CENTRAL AMERICA, PANAMA AND THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

The specialists from Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Panama and the Dominican Republic, convened by the National Women's Institute of the Government of Honduras and the Inter-American Children's Institute (IIN), a specialized organization of the Organization of American States (OAS), at their meeting in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, October 9-10, 2003, at the Subregional Workshop on Public Policies for the Educational and Social Inclusion of Children with Disabilities, hereby adopt the present declaration:

#### CONSIDERING:

1. That in the year 2002, the Inter-American Children's Institute held a similar subregional workshop for the countries of MERCOSUR, plus Bolivia and Chile.

2. That this workshop resulted in a declaration of shared principles, including:

Regarding international instruments:

- 2.1. That, through several different instruments and resolutions, the international community has recognized that all forms of discrimination against persons with disabilities constitute a particularly serious violation of their human rights and that, within these instruments, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, signed and ratified by all of the countries of the subregion, is the most important framework of action for protecting the rights of children and adolescents, since it recognizes children and adolescents as full subjects under the law.
- 2.2. That the Convention on the Rights of the Child contains directives and principles for the development and orientation of social policies on integral protection and for the universalization of policies on health, education and the strengthening of families, in order to protect the integral development of children and adolescents.
- 2.3. That article 23, section 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates that: *“States Parties recognize that a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community”* and that paragraph 3 states that: *“Recognizing the special needs of a disabled child, assistance extended (...) shall be provided free of charge, whenever possible, taking into account the financial resources of*

*the parents or others caring for the child, and shall be designed to ensure that the disabled child has effective access to and receives education, training, health care services, rehabilitation services, preparation for employment and recreation opportunities in a manner conducive to the child's achieving the fullest possible social integration and individual development, including his or her cultural and spiritual development."*

- 2.4. That the Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes the value of international cooperation for development, as an important means for our countries to make progress towards the educational and social inclusion of children and adolescents with disabilities, in accordance with article 4, article 17 (section b), article 23 (section 4), article 24 (section 4), and article 28 (section 3).
- 2.5. That the Declaration of Managua, signed by 36 countries of the Americas in December 1993, states that: *"To ensure social well-being for all people, societies have to be based on justice, equality, inclusion and interdependence, and recognize and accept diversity. Societies must also consider their members, above all, as persons...."*

Regarding the right to education:

- 2.6. That the right of all persons to education is enshrined as a universal right in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and reiterated in the Declaration of the 1990 World Conference on Education for All and the 1994 Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education.
- 2.7. That the World Education Forum held in Dakar in April 2000 (concluding the decade of Education for All which had begun in 1990 at the Conference in Jomtien, Thailand) and the 2000 Assessment of Education for All affirm that the right to education must be made a reality for millions of people all over the world who have been excluded from exercising this right.

Regarding the fight against discrimination:

- 2.8. That in July 1999 the Member States of the Organization of American States (OAS) adopted the Inter-American Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (OAS General Assembly resolution 1608 XXIX-0/99), which provides a guide on general policies for preventing and eliminating discrimination, as well as for promoting their rights and guaranteeing their full inclusion in society.
- 2.9. That the United Nations is working toward an International Convention on the Human Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which will promote respect for the dignity and rights of persons with

disabilities and will contribute to the educational and social inclusion of children and adolescents with disabilities.

2.10. That one of the major achievements of the past decade was the UN General Assembly's adoption of the "Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities" (Resolution A/RES/48/96 of December 20, 1993), urging States to *"recognize the principle of equal primary, secondary and tertiary educational opportunities for children, youth and adults with disabilities, in integrated settings. They should ensure that the education of persons with disabilities is an integral part of the education system."* It also calls on organizations of persons with disabilities to intervene in all decision-making regarding the plans and programs of interests to persons with disabilities or which affect their economic and social situation.

2.11. That progress toward the still-valid goals of the 1982 UN World Program of Action for the Disabled, as well as those of the 1993 Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, requires the design and execution of the above-mentioned policies, plans and programs for the inclusion of children with disabilities, nationally, regionally and locally.

3. That the specialists from the participating countries have presented achievements in the adjustment of domestic legislation, including progress in the areas of education, care, participation, qualification, rehabilitation and equalization of opportunities; achievements that are at different stages of development and which vary from country to country along with the public policies, plans and programs.
4. That studies and experiences on the situation of children and adolescents with disabilities were presented at the Workshop, with the following results:
  - a) We saw, after an analysis of the situation of educational and social inclusion, that many different manifestations of exclusion persist, associated with serious situations of poverty.
  - b) We established that, in the societies of our countries, there are still cultural environments that exclude and discriminate against persons with disabilities; this affects the integral development of children and adolescents with disabilities and will continue to affect it in the future, if correct, timely corrective measures are not taken.
  - c) We found that our countries are at different stages of development regarding the agenda of educational and social inclusion of children and adolescents with disabilities, and we are all united by the firm commitment to progressing towards inclusion as the most appropriate means of development of our children and youth, particularly those with disabilities; evidence of this was shown in the willingness of the specialists participating in this workshop to

exchange experiences, technical support and information within a framework of subregional cooperation.

- d) We were especially concerned about the lack of reliable statistics in official records regarding the number, as well as the educational and social condition, of persons with disabilities, which would give us a clearer idea of the magnitude of the problem at the different levels.
  - e) We also saw that there is a lack of specific public policies for the educational and social inclusion of children and adolescents with disabilities; in addition, there is a lack of coordination and a duplication of work between public institutions and civil society organizations, which wastes resources and makes the work less efficient and effective.
- 5. That the right to participation for children and adolescents with disabilities and their families is a key element for reaching the goal of educational and social inclusion.
  - 6. That it is necessary to strengthen the area of regional and international cooperation, in the quest for sustained progress towards the goal of inclusion.

**CONCLUDE THAT:**

- 1) We must obtain the most extensive political and institutional commitment from governments in the subregion, for planning and executing public educational and social policies to include children and adolescents with disabilities.
- 2) The commitment of the governments and public and private institutions in the countries is necessary for defining these policies and putting them into practice, thus overcoming the obstacles encountered up to now.
- 3) In order to achieve educational and social inclusion of children with disabilities and respect for their rights, we must have a comprehensive strategy comprised of legal, gender, ethnic and generational perspectives, and thus it is essential to intensify the definition and promotion of this strategy.
- 4) We must urgently develop mechanisms for systematizing, monitoring and evaluating experiences and conducting research, as well as an information system with subregional criteria providing consistent, reliable data on which to base decision-making, training and planning of efficient, effective responses for inclusion.
- 5) We must continue the process of adjusting national laws to the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other binding international instruments, as well as planning public policies for inclusion, so that laws and policies follow the rights-based approach.

- 6) For the effective application of the measures included in the policies, plans, programs and projects for the inclusion of children with disabilities, we must consolidate the participation of families, organizations of persons with disabilities, civil society and the community in their design, execution and monitoring.
- 7) The comprehensive child and adolescent protection systems being developed by the countries of the subregion must increase their work regarding the right to inclusion and equality of opportunities for children and adolescents with disabilities, through coordination between the governing bodies in the sectors of education, health, labor, social security, the family, etc. and inter-institutional commissions or professional associations that target their work to specific demand.

**RECOMMEND:**

- 1) Incorporating, into the Inter-institutional Commissions or Professional Associations on Children with Disabilities, the model for the Planning of Targeted Public Policies that the Inter-American Children's Institute (IIN) has been developing for the system of the Organization of American States (OAS).
- 2) Raising awareness and providing training to planners and policymakers on the methodologies for planning, management, coordination and mobilization of resources, to ensure the viability of the policies and plans to be created.
- 3) Considering, above all, that the policies and plans for inclusion require not only preventive and rehabilitative intervention, but also opportunities for the successful insertion of children with disabilities into their communities.
- 4) Defining, in the short term and with subregional criteria, the fundamental areas of intervention (prevention, care, equalization of opportunities) for the suitable planning of public policies and action plans aimed at the educational and social inclusion of children with disabilities.
- 5) Promoting the creation of a high-level technical subregional working group that includes representation of persons with disabilities and parents, to find and distribute information on the progress being made.
- 6) Requesting the support of the Inter-American Children's Institute in following up on the work of this group.
- 7) Urging the governments of the countries in the subregion to take steps toward effective compliance with the provisions of the Inter-American Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities, and manifesting support for the efforts being made by the United Nations toward the adoption of a new, wide-ranging, comprehensive agreement to protect the dignity and rights of persons with disabilities.

- 8) Submitting the present declaration to the Directing Council of the Inter-American Children's Institute and, through it, to the Delegates of the Governments of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama and the Dominican Republic, for their consideration.

In Tegucigalpa, on the tenth of October of the year two thousand and three.

  
Honduras

  
Costa Rica

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