

For Immediate Release

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## UNDP & MWFCO TO HELP THE DISABLED STAY INDEPENDENT

**Johor Bahru, May 15** – The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) will lead a pilot project that will boost the quantity and quality of jobs held by persons with disabilities (PWD) in Johor.

UNDP, in partnership with the Johor state government through the Social Welfare and Labour Departments and the Johor state planning unit (UPEN), is kicking off a holistic advocacy, training and development project titled, *“Encouraging increased participation by People with Disabilities in the Workforce in the State of Johor”* that is touted as crucial in promoting economic as well as social independence among the disabled.

Reflective of Malaysia’s support of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities signed last month, the initial phase of the project will focus on:

- Building awareness about challenges faced by PWDs in securing employment;
- Improving the collection of data and documentation by government agencies as well as NGOs;
- Widening the scope of training at various PWD Vocational Training Institutes; and
- Working with the private and public sectors on an employment trial model which can serve as a best practice for others to replicate

The second phase of the project, which will start in 2009, will look at promoting and expanding the model for employment to other companies in the state, as well as sharing lessons learned and experiences from the project. The UNDP project is the most comprehensive effort to date to improve the well-being of PWDs in Johor.

“These are essential measures to ensure sustained increases in the numbers of PWDs seeking, obtaining and eventually retaining positions in the open employment market,” said Dr. Robia bt. Hj. Kosai, Chairman, Women and Family Development, Welfare and Health State Committee (Johor).

“Apart from improving access to meaningful employment, PWDs can expect to enjoy equal opportunities in terms of educational services, information and communication which are essential elements in the K-economy as well as benefit from economic activities generated under Iskandar Malaysia.”

Johor is among the fastest growing states in the country with over 6 per cent GDP growth and serves as the nexus for Iskandar Malaysia, which has successfully raised US\$10.4 billion (or 70 percent of the US\$14.9 billion target) to date.

It is also the second most populous state in Malaysia and has 24,228 PWDs or 12 per cent of total PWDs registered in 2006, slightly less than Selangor’s figure of 25,624 or 13 per cent.

According to Daratul Baida Osman Khairuddin, Officer-in-charge, UNDP, PWDs remain disproportionately undereducated, untrained, unemployed and poor compared to the average Malaysian.

“There are currently 197,519 PWDs registered with the Social Welfare Department, but the actual figure is expected to be significantly higher.

“With all the relevant stakeholders involved in this project, we expect to make great strides in creating a level playing field for these individuals in the areas of seeking and retaining employment.

“We believe this will not only reduce the number of PWDs living in poverty but also ensure that they have a steady income, which is key to independent living,” said Daratul, adding that the disabled represent an important overlooked development challenge worldwide.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that there are 370 million PWDs in the Asia Pacific region, with 238 million of them of working age. Their unemployment rate is usually double that of the general population and often as high as 80% or more.

To raise public awareness on issues and challenges faced by the disabled, UNDP has engaged former television personality and journalist, Ras Adiba Radzi as the project’s Celebrity Partner.

An exhibition as well as information sessions were also held at the event to promote current government programmes promoting PWD employment such as SPOku (Sistem Penempatan Orang Kurang Upaya) and SBGP-Oku (Skim Bantuan Galakan Perniagaan-Oku).

In December 2007, parliament passed the Persons With Disabilities Bill, which seeks to promote and protect the rights of PWDs by law and establish a National Council for PWDs.

Among the mandates of the Council includes promoting employment opportunities and career advancement for persons with disabilities in the labour market, as well as assistance in finding or obtaining employment on equal basis with persons without disabilities.

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**About UNDP:** UNDP is the UN's global development network, advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life. We are on the ground in 166 countries, working with them on their own solutions to global and national development challenges. As they develop local capacity, they draw on the people of UNDP and our wide range of partners. UNDP’s current priority is to help all countries achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015.

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