

United Nations Development Programme



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Welcome Remarks

“Making Penang Accessible”
**Launch of Transport for Persons with Disabilities-
Support of the Development of Accessible Transport in Penang**
A UNDP-UPEN Project

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Penang

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YB Chow Kon Yeow, Penang State Exco for Government, Traffic Management and Environment

Distinguished guests, colleagues, members of the media

Ladies and Gentlemen

Selamat Pagi and Salam Sejahtera kepada semua para hadirin dan hadirat sekalian.

First, let me welcome you all this morning to the launch of this landmark initiative, "Making Penang Accessible", a joint partnership between the United Nations Development Programme (Malaysia) and the Penang state Economic Planning Unit.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my heartfelt appreciation to YB Chow Kon Yeow for taking time off from his immensely busy schedule to join us this morning.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Last week, the global community marked the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) under the banner of "Dignity and Justice for All of Us". It underscored the importance of upholding the fundamental human rights of PWDs, particularly in the context of breaking the cycle of poverty and disability.

There is a strong, complex and tangible relationship between poverty and disability. In essence, poverty is 'multidimensional,' of which income is just one aspect, and the concepts of inequality and social exclusion are crucial in understanding the root causes of the problem. Poverty for disabled persons is also about social relations and this includes issues of ownership, control, participation and access.

UNDP believes that the protection and promotion of the human rights of individual disabled persons, particularly in the poorest countries where $\frac{3}{4}$ of the disabled population lives, more than 400 million people, is contingent upon development being inclusive.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) provide a universally acknowledged framework for the achievement of these basic rights and the development of a world that is capable of sustaining human rights.

Disabled persons globally have a right to be included in development, and governments implementing development programmes have a duty to actively ensure the full inclusion of disabled persons.

Recognising that persons with disabilities remain disproportionately undereducated, untrained, unemployed and poor, UNDP, through its global development network, is spearheading efforts to integrate the rights of PWDs into our programmatic work as well as to give them a voice in shaping the global development agenda.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

In 2008 Malaysia signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) which came into force in May this year. This, together with the passing of the long awaited Persons with Disabilities Act by Parliament, were major steps for the country in addressing its issues regarding the rights of PWDs.

It indicated the government's firm commitment to eradicating prejudices as well as ensuring the active involvement and participation of persons with disabilities in civil society. While there has been some progress made however, we know that the goal has not yet entirely been reached and certain key areas continue to demand special attention.

The UN estimates that half of persons with disabilities live in areas where essential services such as transport are not available to them, especially in developing countries. In Malaysia, PWDs continue to face limited choices on where they are able to go and how they will get there, with the vast majority of public transportation remaining inaccessible. The consequences of this exclusion are multi-faceted and include the inability to access basic services such as health care, education, training, employment and retail facilities, which undermines their ability to participate in social and cultural life. A lack of transport options may also mean having to be dependent on others for assistance.

The UNDP-UPEN project, titled, "Transport for Persons with Disabilities: Support of the Development of Accessible Transport in Penang," is a two year effort to develop a comprehensive, holistic strategy for accessible public transport in the state by 2010.

This initiative will primarily focus on a complete Access Audit of all public transport facilities in Penang. This will include buses, trains and taxis, ferry terminals, trains and bus stations and airport facilities and infrastructure including bus stops, taxi pick up points, surrounding pavement and pathways with an emphasis on interconnectivity. The findings of this study will form the basis to develop an accessible public transport improvement master plan.

The other initiatives that will be undertaken in the coming months include the establishment of a pilot demand responsive door-to-door transport service for the island, capacity building for disabled people in accessing public transportation, disability equality training for front line transport operators, training on access building requirements and universal design for contractors, architects and civil servants, the design of a model barrier-free bus stop and its surrounding infrastructure, and an awareness campaign to promote the need for an integrated accessible public transport system.

UNDP believes that the key to the success of the project is the cooperation and involvement of all stakeholders including the different Ministries, the state planning departments, transport providers and civil society.

This project represents a comprehensive effort to implement key commitments on accessibility and equality as outlined in the UNCRPD and the Persons with Disabilities Act at the state level and seeks not only to remove obstacles that have hindered the ability of PWDs to travel in the past but to put into place new structures and environments that are non discriminatory.

In short, the project seeks to develop a “best practice” practical model which we hope will be replicated nationwide.

In conclusion, UNDP is hopeful that the project will help move us forward in our efforts to create a just and rights-based society.

The forum and the workshop later today will give stakeholders the opportunity to come together and to discuss key issues and explore best practices and to all participants, I wish you a successful and productive day.

Let me once again thank our project partners for their support and cooperation in implementing this project, which reflects the commitment at all levels of the Penang state government to ensure that accessibility is not an option but a right for all.

Thank you.