

United Nations Development Programme



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**Project Launch Ceremony:
“Encouraging increased participation by Persons with
Disabilities in the Workforce in the State of Johor”**

Welcome Remarks by
Daratul Baida Osman Khairuddin
Officer-in-Charge, UNDP Malaysia

15 May 2008
Puteri Pan Pacific Hotel, Johor Bahru

Y.B. Dr. Robia bt. Hj. Kosai, Chairman, Women and Family Development, Welfare and Health State Committee, Johor

Director, Department of Social Welfare (or representative) – name TBD

Dato' Hamsan bin Saringat, Director, Johor State Economic Planning Unit

Ras Adiba Radzi, UNDP Celebrity Partner

Distinguished guests, members of the media

Ladies and Gentlemen

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

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the launch of this landmark project, "Encouraging increased participation by Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in the Workforce in the State of Johor."

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my heartfelt appreciation to you all for taking time off your busy schedules to join us this afternoon.

I would especially like to thank the Johor state planning unit (UPEN), as well as the Labour and Social Welfare Departments for their support for this important initiative.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

There are approximately 650 million persons around the world living with disabilities, roughly 10 percent of the global population. They make up the world's largest minority. Eighty percent of persons with disabilities (PWDs) are living in developing countries.

In April, Malaysia joined the ranks of some 128 countries that have signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). The convention which came into force earlier this month is groundbreaking in many ways, and represents the aspirations of a group of persons that has been too often overlooked in development.

The convention prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities in all areas of life, including employment, access to justice and the right to education, health services and access to transportation. It requires that public spaces and buildings be accessible to persons with disabilities, and it seeks improvements in information and communications infrastructure.

The Convention also recognizes that a change of attitude is vital if disabled people are to achieve equality and has a significant focus on social development.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

For many years, persons with disabilities tended to be viewed as “objects” of welfare policies. Today, as a result of a dramatic shift in perspective in many countries, PWDs have started to be viewed as people who must enjoy the full spectrum of civil, political, social, cultural and economic rights.

Recognizing that PWDs 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:

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.

There are currently about 198,000 PWDs registered with the Social Welfare Department, although the actual figure is expected to be significantly higher. This project is the first of two UNDP initiatives to be launched this year that aim to boost independent living among PWDs. This project, to be based in Johor, seeks to reduce the number of PWDs living in poverty and ensure that they are able to find, secure and retain meaningful employment.

This project represents the most comprehensive effort to date to review barriers that have hindered the participation of PWDs in the workforce in the past and to develop a “best practice” model based on a trial with both the private and public sectors. It will build the capacity of existing government and NGO-led employment programmes to match potential employees to employers and will support efforts to integrate PWDs into the workplace.

In addition, the project contains a substantive education and awareness component to fight negative stereotypes and prejudices and to promote the contributions of PWDs to society.

Central to this effort will be the involvement of UNDP’s celebrity partner, Ras Adiba Radzi, who is, as many of you know, a passionate advocate on disability issues.

With the involvement of all relevant stakeholders, we expect to make great strides in creating a level playing field for PWDs in seeking and retaining jobs in open employment.

In conclusion, let me once again thank our project partners for their support in implementing this project, which reflects the commitment at all levels of the Johor

state government to raise the economic and social independence of persons with disabilities (PWDs).

UNDP is hopeful that the project will help support Malaysia's obligations to the UNCRPD and usher in a new era in creating a just and rights-based society.

Thank you.