

# Shafallah forum gets a boost

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By Bonnie James

A host of famous personalities who are making a difference to the lives of the needy, and those who have overcome challenges and inspire others, raise the profile of Shafallah Center's 4th Annual International Forum on Children with Special Needs, which begins in Doha today.

The three-day event, held under the patronage of HH the Emir's wife, HH Sheikha Mozah Nasser al-Misnad, has been growing in stature and relevance with each passing year and is emerging as a globally-acclaimed platform to promote the rights of the target group.

Former British first lady and rights campaigner Cherie Blair, first ladies Teuta Topi (Albania), Vivian Fernandez de Torrijos (Panama), Maria Kaczynska (Poland), Xiomara Castro de Zelaya (Honduras), and Dorrit Moussaieff (Iceland) are among the prominent women participants.

One of the greatest Olympians of all time Carl Lewis, Paralympian gold medallists Chris Waddell (US), Hou Bin (China), Best Buddies International founder and chairman Anthony Kennedy Shriver, accomplished Paralympian Sir Philip Craven, and Autism Speaks co-founders Suzanne and Bob Wright are among the other distinguished attendees.

Cherie Blair, who has been attending the forum ever since its inception in 2006, is the co-chair of the event. A leading barrister in the field of discrimination and human rights and a committed campaigner for women's equality, she is involved in the work of many charities.

The first lady of Panama, Vivian Fernandez de Torrijos, is the founder of the Agency for Joint Development Aid, an organisation that carries out humanitarian projects in her country.

A UN Goodwill Special Ambassador, the focus of her work is on public health, rural women, persons with disabilities, and youth.

Albanian first lady, holder of a Master's on Environmental Science and Technology, Teuta Topi has been active in programmes of social and public interest issues such as gender pertinence and European integration.

The first lady of Poland, Maria Kaczynska, participates in charity projects, using her position to help impoverished and handicapped persons, notably children with health problems and disabilities.

Xiomara Castro de Zelaya, the first lady of Honduras, is a very active campaigner against HIV in her country, with an emphasis to the younger people and woman.

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