

Shafallah is among the top special needs centres: Mozah



Publish Date: Tuesday, 21 April, 2009, at 12:30 PM Doha Time
By Bonnie James

GULF TIMES

HH Sheikha Mozah Nasser al-Misnad has expressed the hope that Qatar and the world can mirror the qualities of perseverance, oneness and kindness shown by people with special needs and their families.

She was delivering the welcome address yesterday at the opening session of the fourth Annual International Forum of the Shafallah Center for Children with Special Needs, on the topic 'Achieving Independence.'

An array of prominent personalities from various walks of life, including the former British first lady and rights campaigner Cherie Blair and first ladies Teuta Topi (Albania), Vivian Fernandez de Torrijos (Panama), Maria Kaczynska (Poland), Xiomara Castro de Zelaya (Honduras), and Dorrit Moussaieff (Iceland), were present.

"All of us here share a commitment to the inclusiveness of people with special needs, they have the right to be educated, to work in a healthy environment, and to be independent and contributing members of the society, and this is exactly what has happened at Shafallah," she said.

"Shafallah has taken its place among other state-of-the-art centres that apply technology to social issues," HH Sheikha Mozah asserted.

"We are very proud of the work being carried on here, with the inspired help of top class faculty, dedicated students and a supportive community," she said.

Without a supportive and energetic community, progress will be limited despite having all the technology in the world and all the good intentions as well.

"Shafallah has done a wonderful job in advocating for people with special needs throughout the region and in fact the world. We would not have achieved what we have without the generous support of families, parents and the larger community," she observed.

HH Sheikha Mozah pointed out that Qatar has been trying to improve the lives of all its citizens, including those with special needs.

In 2008 Qatar signed the UN International Convention on Rights of People with Disabilities and issued an Emiri Decree to ratify the principles stated in the Convention.

"Also, Qatar is working to develop better rehabilitation services, provide a suitable environment in buildings, roads and public spaces, and in training programmes for institutions to encourage the inclusion of these precious citizens in the work place," she said.

HH Sheikha Mozah referred to the legislation which requires 2% of all government jobs and those in public institutions to be set aside for people with special needs.

Private businesses employing more than 25 people are also required to hire people with special needs, she added.

Shafallah Center's chairman Hassan Ali bin Ali acknowledged that the vision and patronage of HH Sheikha Mozah created the institution so as to enable "our most vulnerable children to learn and thrive."

"Since 1998, the Shafallah Center has grown from a small facility to one that flourishes with a current student level of 521, supported by a total of 635 special educators, clinicians, researchers, carers, and social and ancillary workers," he explained.

The official pointed out that within a short span, the forum has led to the establishment of meaningful partnerships and collaborations that have been effective and influential at a global level.

"Together we have championed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and once it was passed, we issued a manual on how to implement it," he added.