

# Qatar wins praise for adopting UN Convention



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The adoption and ratification of the UN Convention on the rights of people with disabilities by several countries show the willingness among parties to tackle the issue of disabilities, former British prime minister Tony Blair's wife Cherie Blair has said.

She was speaking to Gulf Times during an interview yesterday on the sidelines of the ongoing fourth Annual International Forum being organised by the Shafallah Center for Children with Disabilities.

The convention was adopted by the UN in December 2006 and it was open for signature in March 2007.

So far, 139 countries are signatories to the convention while 82 are under its optional protocol.

"We have to acknowledge the fact that the convention is the first comprehensive human rights treaty of the 21st century, because due to poverty, disease and conflict ravaging the world, there is a growing need to acknowledge the rights of the disabled," she said.

However, Blair said, the convention was not the end of the story, saying it was just the beginning.

"We know that the UN conventions are there to serve as guidelines to issues. It is now left to individual country to follow and implement them according to the spirit and letters," she said.

She praised Qatar for being one of the first countries to adopt and ratify the convention.

Recalling an earlier meeting with HH Sheikha Mozah Nasser al-Misnad, Blair said: "Sheikha Mozah was posing to us this morning the question of where to go next after the convention because putting the law together is not enough but how to implement the law and turn it into reality of people and issues on ground is very important."

She mentioned that the meeting reviewed a number of general issues and participants shared experiences on how to look into issues, especially on ensuring independence for the disabled.

"Enabling disabled people is an important issue and I think many parents of disabled children who can see that their children are being helped in the school environment will also worry about what would happen to their kids after the school age," she said.

"Unless, we actually prepare for the disabled beyond the school, we will not be fully fulfilling our responsibilities of allowing them to become good citizens. Above all, we have to make sure that the best tools money can buy are available to the poorest."

She described Sheikha Mozah as very articulate, strong and powerful and an incredible role model for Arab women while acknowledging that there are many Arab women across the region whose voices are yet to be heard.

She also praised the facilities at the Shafallah Center