

# 'Disabled need more opportunities to work'

Web posted at: 4/21/2009 3:57:44  
Source ::: The PENINSULA/ BY HUDAN V

DOHA: Laws for ensuring equality for people with special needs have not been able to provide adequate employment opportunities to them, according to experts at the fourth Annual International Shafallah Forum. The three-day forum, with the theme 'Achieving Independence', aims to help overcome factors that perpetuate marginalisation of the disabled, including widespread poverty due to lack of access to education, opportunities, and unfair labour practices.

Employment is crucial to giving people financial security and brings along with it independence and equality, which are vital to any human. The importance of the right to paid work for all has not diminished since the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Despite tough laws enforced in many countries, discrimination against disabled people in the workplace is still rife. "Every year, in the UK, over 5,000 disability discrimination cases are brought to the employment tribunal, and hundreds of thousands of disabled people experience unequal treatment at work or in the recruitment process," said Cherie Blair, wife of former British Prime Minister Tony Blair and a leading human rights lawyer.

"Many more cases go unchallenged or unreported. From being refused an interview and being overlooked for promotion; to being denied the adjustments, equipment or flexible working practices they need to do their job — access to employment is by no means easy for many disabled people."

Creating an opportunity for them to contribute and have it recognised can help overcome the traditional stereotype of disabled people being passive dependents. This can also help their colleagues in many ways, Blair said. "Working alongside disabled people can be instrumental in helping to tackle stereotypes and promoting greater awareness and understanding of disabled people's needs. Making adjustments for disabled people in the workplace can also have knock-on benefits for other groups of people, helping to promote greater social inclusion and equality for all." Work is not just important for giving disabled people economic independence. It is also instrumental in exploding stereotypes and reducing social and physical barriers which serve to exclude disabled people from society at large. In this sense, work is also a crucial vehicle for promoting independence in day-to-day life. Psychologically, work helps to provide structure and focus to lives, and provides a sense of purpose.

"The greater appreciation of disabled people's role above and beyond work is long overdue but this does not change the fact that, in the UK for example, there are still one million disabled people who want to work but can't get a job. Disabled people have the same aspirations, hopes and dreams as any other person. And they just want the same opportunities to fulfill these aspirations as everyone else," she said.

Caroline Waters, Director of People and Policy, BT Group, said employing disabled people in business can help to reach out to a wider society. "With a little bit of encouragement and help they can enjoy life and work. The problems that disabled people face has got little to do with their disability. All the barriers these people face are external. A diverse workforce can help to access people from different backgrounds, which is a competitive advantage for the organisation," she said.

"Disabled people face hurdles on a day-to-day basis and hence can tackle any challenges and find extraordinary solutions. They have unique perspectives and can change not just what we do and how we do things. Employing the disabled is not risky, disruptive or expensive — it is just plain business sense. A diverse workforce makes for better business. It is the difference that alone can make the difference," Waters said.



H H Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al Missned with students of Shafallah Center during the fourth Annual International Shafallah Forum yesterday and disabled students



Students of Shafallah Center making a musical presentation ---- Shaival Dalal