

# Sheikha Mozah stresses Qatar's resolve for differently-abled

Lauds Shafallah centre's efforts for supporting people with special needs

AILYN AGONIA - DOHA Her Highness Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser al Missned stressed Qatar's strong commitment to work for the rights of those with autism disorder and disabled.

Addressing the international delegation at the opening of the fourth Annual International Shafallah Forum here on Monday, HH Sheikha Mozah lauded the efforts of the centre for supporting the cause of the differently-abled people. The three-day forum is a flagship annual event of Shafallah, which brings together academicians, experts and research scholars on a single platform and gives them an opportunity to share their ideas and best practices in providing proper assistance and generating public awareness concerning autism and disability.

This year's forum with the theme, "Achieving Independence" will showcase the efforts and contributions of different organisations in helping disabled people at the workplace and in the society.

Shafallah's invaluable contribution in the field will also be presented during the sessions. In her speech, HH Sheikha Mozah acknowledged the contributions of different organisations represented at the forum in advocating the rights of the disabled people and providing them necessary assistance.

Elaborating the extent of support provided by the Qatari government to the cause, HH Sheikha Mozah said the country had signed the UN International Convention on Rights of People with Disabilities and also issued an Emiri Decree to ratify the principles stated in the Convention last year. HH Sheikha Mozah said, "The state is working to develop better rehabilitation centres, suitable environment at workplaces, roads and public spaces for these people."

"We are encouraging institutions to appoint these precious citizens in their organisations. In fact, we have passed a legislation to reserve 2 percent of all government jobs and those in public institutes for the people with special needs. Private businesses employing more than 25 people are also required to hire people with special needs," Her Highness added.

Shafallah Chairman Hassan Ali bin Ali welcomed the highprofile guests who are also the champions of human rights in their respective countries. Those present on the occasion were the first ladies of Albania, Panama, Poland, Honduras and Iceland as well as the wife of Prime Minister of Lebanon Madame Hoda Siniora and Princess of Morocco Lalla Amina.

He also acknowledged the invaluable support and contribution of human rights barrister and Scope patron Cherie Blair as his co-chairman at the forum. Dr Hassan, in his welcome remarks, elaborated the facilities available at Shafallah since it was founded under the patronage of Her Highness in 1998.

Talking to Qatar Tribune, the heads of different organisations who have cemented a bond with Shafallah through the annual forum, expressed their admiration towards the leadership of Qatar in spearheading the campaign on autism and disability awareness.

Autism Speaks founders Suzanne and Bob Wright, lauded the efforts of Her Highness in this 'extraordinarily special' campaign and expressed their willingness to work with the country through Shafallah in this cause. "Autism Speaks works in raising awareness around the world. We are delighted to work with Shafallah in its campaign," Suzanne said.

International Paralympic Committee President Sir Philip Craven lauded the theme of this year's forum, which aims to promote independence among the disabled people especially at the workplace. "Shafallah is not only advocating the cause of disabled people through modern technology but also assisting them in providing employment. But the most important approach of Shafallah is respecting the choices of its students by forcing them not to work in an environment they are uncomfortable with," he said.

Among the highlights of the first-day of the forum included the discussions on the Shafallah Community Services Programme which particularly prepares the Center's graduates in joining the real world as an employee of an organisation and the stunning musical performance by some Shafallah students. Katie Meade from the US and Best Buddies Friendship Ambassador also delivered an inspiring talk on her personal experiences in coping with her disability by living a normal life and being proud to be a part of the workforce.

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