

Cherie Blair hails Shafallah's efforts

AILYN AGONIA - DOHA A leading advocate of human rights and a crusader against discrimination, Cherie Blair commended the efforts of Qatar for using its resources in promoting the rights of the disabled people and providing access to all the needy ones to the Shafallah Center, which is known as one of the best in the world having facilities in the field of autism and disability.

Talking to mediapersons at the 4th Annual International Shafallah Forum here on Monday, the wife of former British prime minister Tony Blair cited the example of Qatar's commitment to the cause by being among the first countries to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. She said, "The fact that this very first convention of the 21st century is about people with disabilities

is a very strong statement of the willingness across the world to deal with the issue. But, as what Her Highness Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser al Missned emphasised in her inaugural speech of the Forum, what matters is really what we do about it. The UN convention is not the end of the story. It is actually just the beginning and provides the guidelines and direction to the member countries. Since we all know that the treaty have limited responsibility, it is up to the independent countries to use its principles and implement them in their way. The UN convention is definitely a start and Qatar was among those who immediately recognised it."

Cherie, who is also a patron of 'Scope' and has developed a good personal relationship with the Shafallah Center, also praised the availability of state-of-the-art facilities at the Center. "I think we are lucky that Qatar is making sure that the best available facilities are readily available for all who need them. It is remarkable that this country has been using its wealth to make a difference in the condition of those with disabilities through provisions like their fabulous pool for water therapy, specially-designed chairs and other equipment for therapy.

'Scope' is a disability organisation in England and Wales which works for people with cerebral palsy. According to Blair, it was founded by a group of parents of children with cerebral palsy during the World War-II.

She said that during that period children with cerebral palsy were branded in England as ineligible or hopeless cases. Through 'Scope', they started educating the public on how families and society should properly deal with such disability. Cherie's presentation on 'Time to Get Equal' at the forum on Monday emphasised the importance of promoting the disabled people's independence through employment and empowering them in the society by letting them earn their livelihood.

She is setting up the 'Cherie Blair Foundation for Women', in addition to over 20 charity organisations she is involved with. On the question whether she is planning to work with Qatar for empowering women, Cherie said that was something she very much wanted to do, especially with Her Highness Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser al Missned, whom she regarded an incredible role model for Arab women and the women across the world.

Qatar Tribune
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