**Workshop on enhancing cooperation between United Nations and regional mechanisms for the promotion and protection of human rights**

**Panel 4: Strengthening cooperation in promoting and protecting economic, social and cultural rights of persons with disabilities**

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**Working paper on**

**"Best practices and role of Qatar National Human Rights Committee (QNHRC) in promoting and protecting economic, social and cultural rights of persons with disabilities"**

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**Objective of this session:**

This session will allow participants to share methods of work, best practices and lessons learned and standards developed by each UN and regional mechanisms in promoting and protecting economic, social and cultural rights of persons with disabilities.

**Introduction:**

We all know well that persons with disabilities make up the largest minority in the world; however, a large number of them live in poverty and suffer from isolation and deprivation of education, employment and health care. There is no doubt that disability worldwide played an active role in the development of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities; this convention has formed a turning point in changing discrimination and marginalization based attitudes for this category. However, persons with disabilities still need further efforts to remove barriers that affect their active involvement and engagement in society.

National human rights institutions have wide mandate based on protecting and promoting human rights, on the basis of the Paris principles, which is considered the legal reference for their establishment and setting their mandate; most importantly following-up on achieving the objectives set out in international human rights conventions to which the States are parties, submitting recommendations to the concerned authorities, including submitting proposals on existing legislation and bills, and studying the extent of their compliance with the provisions of international standards.

National human rights institutions have several quasi-judicial powers, including reporting violations of human rights, working on the settlement of submitted complaints through cooperation and coordination with the competent authorities, and proposing ways to address and prevent them.

National institutions also have the responsibility of cooperation and building partnerships with international and regional human rights mechanisms, as well as promoting awareness and education of human rights at the local level.

Given the importance of the role of national human rights institutions in protecting and promoting economic, social and cultural rights of persons with disabilities, I would like to introduce to you a brief on **the experience and role of the National Human Rights Committee of Qatar (QNHRC) in promoting and protecting economic, social and cultural rights of persons with disabilities:**

**First: At the national level**

**1- Legislation:**

Qatar National Human Rights Committee (QNHRC) urged the government to ratify the Convention the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In 2008, the NHRC has submitted recommendations for changing national legislation in line with the provisions of the Convention. The government reacted positively to those recommendations, where the NHRC were invited to participate in the preparation of a bill amending law No. (2) for the year 2004, a special law for persons with special needs.

The NHRC has contributed in developing **7** new provisions on the economic, social and cultural rights, and drafting resolutions dealt with the right to education, health, employment and housing standards, as well as the right of access to public and private facilities, as well as cultural and sports services. The draft resolution is approved by the ministerial Cabinet in 2012 and legislative procedures are on progress.

The issuance of the decision in the State of Qatar will be a full legislative step to comply with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

**2- Raising awareness of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities:**

QNHRC since the beginning of its work, realized that the difficulties and challenges facing people with disabilities in getting their economic, social and cultural rights are not related to funding in the Gulf states, including Qatar, where all the necessary resources for the advancement of this category are available. However, there is an urgent need for awareness and education to create a new mentality that positively consider the concept of disability which was considered for a long time something raises concerns of people, this in turn requires making efforts especially by the media, to change misconceptions and define the rights of this category.

The NHRC signed MOU with the Supreme Council for Family Affairs for three years (2011-2013), aimed to raise awareness of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); many seminars and workshops have been implemented, in which they targeted employees of government institutions, non-governmental and civil society organizations and persons with disabilities.

**3- Monitoring and visits:**

This mechanism is one of the most important mechanisms of action of QNHRC where visits to institutions and centers for persons with disabilities are conducted, including The Social Cultural Center for the Deaf, Al Noor Institute for the Blind, Shafallah Center for Children with Special Needs; the researchers conducted these visits submitted a number of reports on their visits including shortcomings observed there.

Based on these visits, the NHRC submitted semi-annual reports to the ministerial cabinet on the situation of human rights.

1. **Education and employment:**

The National Human Rights Committee submitted a draft resolution to the ministerial cabinet to exempt non- Qatari students with disabilities from tuition in the public schools; together with all the other needs required from persons with disabilities in various facilities.

The NHRC issued a statement expressing its concern about the waiting lists of children with disabilities in Shafallah Center for Children with special needs, in which it called on the need to provide qualified specialists in addition to expanding the process of conducting training courses for the Qatari youth to deal with these children.

The NHRC also called in another statement on the need for a specialized center for the training of children with "implanted Cochlear" and not to depend only on the training provided by Hamad Medical Corporation, so as not to lead to a waste of targeted results of such an operation.

In line with the right to decent work, the NHRC is employing a number of persons with disabilities in the Committee (3 employees).

1. **Studies and Research:**

The National Human Rights Committee conducted 2 studies:

- In (2009), on the extent of the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in centers that deal with this category; this study included 7 centers providing medical, social and educational services.   
- in 2010, on the "deaf" children, who have had cochlear implants operations.

Those studies came out of several recommendations, including increasing the number of cadres, in addition to the development of mechanisms to prevent discrimination against women with disabilities in the exercise of certain social rights.

**Second: At the regional level**

**A- Cooperation with the GCC countries:**

The National Human Rights Committee in cooperation with the Cultural Center for the Deaf in 2009, organized the first Gulf Forum for the Deaf, where several recommendations were came out of, relating to the right to education, the right to work, the right to social welfare, and the right to health care, and other recommendations related to building the institutional and legislative frameworks, issues relating to rehabilitation, in addition to issues relating to translation and interpretation of sign language in the Arab region.

**B- Cooperation with the Asia Pacific Forum (APF):**

The Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (APF) is a regional organization founded in 1996 in accordance with the provisions of Australian law; it gathered about 21 national institution for human rights in the Asia Pacific region; It aims to strengthen, promote and support the establishment of more institutions. It has special programs for capacity building on disability, and provides legal advice on cooperation with regional and international mechanisms for the protection of human rights.

APF plays an important role in the drafting of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; The APF’s Working Group on Disability was represented by Ms. Anuradha Mohit (National Human Rights Commission of India) at the meetings of the United Nations Ad Hoc Committee on a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities.  
  
In August 2006, the United Nations Ad Hoc Committee adopted the draft Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol, which was approved by the UN General Assembly on December 13, 2006.

At the 12th Annual Meeting in 2007, APF member institutions agreed to share information, ideas and experiences to assist with domestic implementation of the Convention. They each agreed to establish a disability ‘focal point’ and to communicate regularly to discuss progress in protecting, promoting and monitoring the rights of people with disabilities.

In May 2009, the APF presented a statement to the UN Interactive Panel Dialogue on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognizing the important role of independent national institutions to monitor and implement the Convention at the country level.

APF Forum Councilors elected QNHRC as its new Chair for a two year period until 2015.

**Third: At the international level**

The National Human Rights Committee of Qatar responds to all questionnaires and questions on matters relating to persons with disabilities. QNHRC is in the process of preparing a parallel report on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

QNHRC participates periodically in all conferences held by of State parties to the convention starting from the first session and until the last session.

QNHRC participated in the high-level meeting on disability and development "the way forward" a disability inclusive development agenda towards 2015 which was held in September 23, 2013.

**Challenges and future directions**

Despite the creation and establishment of several bodies and institutions concerned with the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities at the governmental and non-governmental levels, our challenge is to promote closer ties of cooperation and coordination between the NHRC and these bodies and institutions in order to provide greater protection for the rights of persons with disabilities.

The UN Human Rights Training Centre for South-West Asia and the Arab Region was officially inaugurated by the High Commissioner in May 2009 in Doha, Qatar. The main objective of the Centre is to strengthen human rights knowledge and skills within its region of operation. This center supports the NHRC overcoming some of the difficulties, training of national cadres, capacity-building and development.

**Thank you**