

## **EDITOR'S COMMENT**

---

On May 2008, the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities came into force. Twenty nine countries are parties to the convention till date, while a further 101 have signed but not yet ratified it.

This milestone represents a huge step forward for the disability sector and for people with disabilities all over the world. It represents the shift from traditionally held views on disability and people with disabilities, to recognition of their rights which are the same as everyone else in their communities and countries. It is also recognition of the vibrant and active disabled persons' organisations that have been in existence for a long time in much of the developed world and for a lesser time in developing countries.

The UN CRPD has generated many expectations, hopes and aspirations. It is also generating debates on the concepts of rights and social justice in the field of disability, in particular on the differing understanding and application of these concepts in the developed and developing world. In this context, the distinction between the developed and developing world is sometimes artificial, as there are affluent sections of the population, including people with disabilities, in every developing country with access to similar resources as those available in a developed country. When it comes to service provision, access to services and affordability, it is more appropriate to make the distinction between resource rich and resource poor people with disabilities, regardless of whether they live in a developing or developed country. When it comes to rights and social justice however, there may be differences between developing or developed countries.

Social justice generally refers to the vision of a society where all people are treated fairly, justly and impartially with equal rights, opportunities and benefits. Such a concept will give rise to various interpretations of what is 'fair', 'impartial' or 'just', depending on who is defining it and for what purpose. It may not be possible to have objective criteria or standards for social justice that are applicable all over the world, although it seems to be generally agreed that equality and protection of rights are the most important and fundamental tenets of this concept.

In developing countries with large populations, limited resources and sometimes scant respect for human rights, perspectives on social justice can be different. For policy makers in these countries, allocation of resources where there is potential for maximum benefit for the greatest number, may take precedence over emphasis on individual rights. For many people, including people with disabilities in these countries, social justice is sometimes more about access to services and benefits, and extreme positions on any aspect of rights or social justice may be viewed with concern. For example, some disabled persons' organisations from the developed world see prevention of causes of impairment as an attack on the rights of people with disabilities to be born and to live. Many in the disability sector from developing countries, including disabled persons' organisations and families of people with disabilities, do not agree with this view.

Eventually it is important to look at what is appropriate in any given context, and not to copy or transplant ideas and concepts that have apparently been well accepted or successful elsewhere. Healthy debates on social justice, rights and legal services within the framework of the UNCRPD, as applicable within different country contexts need to be encouraged and promoted.

**Dr. Maya Thomas**

Editor

J-124 Ushas Apts, 16th Main, 4th Block

Jayanagar, Bangalore - 560 011, India

e-mail: m\_thomas@rediffmail.com