

**Press Information Bureau
Government of India
Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment**

07-November-2013 14:33 IST

**National Conference on Intellectual Disability: Empowering Persons with
Intellectual Disabilities**

The Union Minister for Social Justice & Empowerment, Kumari Selja inaugurated the National Conference on Intellectual Disability, jointly organized by the Department of Disability Affairs, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment and National Institute for Mentally Handicapped, Secunderabad, here today.

Addressing the conference the Minister, Kumari Selja said that this conference has special relevance in the present context because of the complex nature of problems. Mental retardation is a complex condition which affects the development of cognitive functions, motor functions, social and communication skills of the Individual. It is one of the core areas where active involvement of multi-disciplinary specialists and parents or guardians is required for planning for therapeutic intervention.

The Minister further added that as per 2001 Census out of the total number of persons with disabilities of about 2.19 crores, the number of persons with mental disabilities was about 23 lakhs. The causative factors of intellectual disabilities have their influence in the pre-conceptual, pre-natal, peri-natal and post-natal phases of the life cycle of a child. Intellectual disability can also occur due to hereditary reasons.

Persons with disabilities are prevented from reaching their full potential not only due to their impairment, but as a result of discriminatory barriers in terms of legal, attitudinal and architectural aspects. The Minister emphasized that the Ministry is fully committed to removing barriers, physical or otherwise for the empowerment of persons with disabilities and to ensure their full and equal participation.

Kumari Selja said that India is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). In order to fulfill its obligations under UNCRPD, the Ministry is actively working on enactment of a new Act replacing existing PwD Act 1995. The new Bill envisages more rights and entitlements to all categories of persons with disabilities including the persons with intellectual disabilities and would also improve implementation mechanisms. Apart from implementation of the United Nations Convention on Persons with Disabilities in its letter and spirit, the Ministry is also engaged in achieving the goals, targets and indicators as envisaged in the Incheon Strategy to 'Make the Rights Real' piloted by the UNESCAP.

The Minister wished the National Conference all success and hoped that its findings would be useful for ensuring speedy empowerment of persons with Intellectual Disabilities.

The Secretary, Department of Disability Affairs, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Ms. Stuti Kacker addressing the Conference said that the problems being faced by the persons with intellectual disabilities are unique as compared to other forms of disabilities. Studies show that 42% of intellectual disabilities occur due to illness during childhood followed by head injury, as well as problems during pregnancy and birth related complications. This implies a lot is required to be done in the R& D sector for identification and early intervention to reverse the trend of growing numbers of intellectual disabilities in the country.

The Secretary said that the Working Group constituted by Planning Commission for the XII Five Year Plan observed that there is lack of opportunity for mentally ill person to ensure full recovery, inability of the family to provide adequate level of care, lack of preparedness to address differential need of such class of disability and also there is inadequate rehabilitation service available to the mentally challenged person. An objective assessment of the situation indicates that there is an urgent need to think in an innovative manner for early intervention and prevention of mental disabilities.

Considering the urgent need of rehabilitation services and shortage of professionals to handle the complex problems of this group of very special persons the Secretary informed that the Department of Disability Affairs is in the process of initiating a proposal to set up National Institute of Mental Health Rehabilitation.

The Joint Secretary, Department of Disability Affairs, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Shri Awanish Awasthi, in his address at the Conference said that this is the first such conference and the Department has planned similar national level conferences of National Institutes as it is felt that there is a genuine need to address the issues relating to the sector. The Joint Secretary further added that the Department is addressing the various need of the persons with disabilities and together will be able to build a strong, meaningful, sustainable and comprehensive rehabilitation program to enhance the quality of life of persons with disabilities.

Present at the Conference were Poonam Natrajan, Chairperson, National Trust, Maj. General Ian Cardozo, Chairman, Rehabilitation Council of India, Shri T. C. Siva Kumar, Director, NIMH and various officials of organizations -- PARIVAAR, the National Confederation of Parents Organizations, Action for Autism- National Centre for Autism, Down Syndrome Federation of India, Indian Academy of Pediatrics and Indian Association of Clinical Psychologists.

The National Institute for the Mentally Handicapped (NIMH), Secunderabad was established in the year 1984 to with the primary objective to cater to the needs of Persons with Mental Retardation. NIMH has facilities for providing comprehensive therapeutic services for children with intellectual disabilities right from infancy stage to any age level.

In order to meet the demand for the trained professionals NIMH is involved in manpower development by conducting long term academic programs from Diploma to M.Phil level. NIMH is also involved in research and developmental activities. The results of the research and developmental activities are disseminated through their published books, pamphlets, leaflets, videos, posters, radio-spots, etc.
