
UN Human Rights Council
UPR Working Group 29th Session, 23 January 2018

Israel

Delivered by Mr. Avremi Torem,
Commissioner for Equal Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Mr President,

Thank you for the opportunity to present our work before this honorable Forum. My name is Avremi Torem and I have been working in the field of persons with disabilities for over 16 years, starting as the CEO of an organization for young adults with disabilities and today as the Commissioner for Equal Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In doing this I took on the challenge of moving from civil society to government.

The Commission for Equal Rights of Persons with Disabilities was established in 2000 and was charged with the implementation of the Equal Rights for Persons with Disabilities Law. Upon ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2012, the Commission was made responsible for promoting it and monitoring its implementation.

The Commission is a separate body within the Ministry of Justice. It has a separate budget, offices and personnel and an independent voice. The Commission acts to enhance equality, fight discrimination and eliminate accessibility barriers. We do this through legal tools, policy change, enforcement and public information.

We use public campaigns, media and lectures to tackle the complex issue of social attitudes. Our unique public campaigns have been on TV, radio and social media in Hebrew Arabic and Russian. Today 17% of our population – 1.4 million are persons with disabilities.

A significant challenge is making public places accessible, Israel has legislated a set of accessibility requirements which apply to both private and public buildings and services as well as other issues such as transportation and higher education. I'm happy to announce that just last week we passed the regulations regarding education, which will provide both children and parents with the specific individual accommodations needed.

In order to best enforce the accessibility law, our Commission has supervisors working throughout the country with the role of monitoring the implementation of the relevant law and regulations.

An additional tool the Commission uses is complaints from the public addressing professional questions, lack of accessibility or discrimination. We assist in resolving issues, continue enforcement, and when needed we also file civil and criminal suits. A notable civil law suit was filed by the commission in 2017 dealing with taxi drivers that would not allow a person with visual impairment traveling with a guide dog to ride in the taxi. In another case we filled a class action suit on the issue of lack of audio announcements on public busses, this is the first time a public entity has submitted a class action.

Realizing equality, inclusion and independence according to the CRPD also require changes in laws or policies. Only last year Israel amended the legal capacity law providing options for supported decision making and "enduring power of attorney" instead of guardianship.

We work closely with the Ministry of Education on their policies regarding inclusive education. We feel that today, more than ever before, the educational system is truly becoming more inclusive and allows more children to enjoy mainstream education.

Change is also occurring in the policies of the Ministries of Health, Labour, Social Affairs and Social Services, We conduct spot visits to housing facilities and psychiatric hospitals to monitor the situation of Persons with disabilities and report on any modifications needed. In the past year, also following our recommendations the Ministry of Health has announced a change in their policy regarding the use of restraints in psychiatric hospitals. This led to a dramatic reduction in this practice by 56 percent on average.

The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Social Services has initiated a major reform with the aim of providing services to support community inclusion according to a person's needs and abilities instead of according to a specific impairment.

[As my colleague has mentioned] My final point addresses the key issue of employment.

In 2016 the Israeli Parliament – the Knesset, passed an amendment to the Equal Rights Law mandating that each public entity that employs more than 100 people must reach an appropriate representation of 5% of persons with disabilities . The Commission has enforcement powers to implement this law and we also assist people to realize their rights and work to eliminate barriers for employment and raise public awareness.

Finally, on a personal note, as the Commissioner and as someone who has worked for many years in the civil society I believe that only cross-sectorial partnership can lead to real social change. Every day we cooperate with highly experienced and dedicated NGOs, Disability Human Rights organizations, and activists with disabilities.

We work closely with our Advisory Board of 18 members, of which 60% are persons with disabilities.

Esteemed Council members,

In my vision, equality and inclusion are core interests of the entire Israeli society.

Only if we work together, not just as a State, but also universally, we will manage to achieve full and equal rights to all peoples in our societies and bring a real social change.

Thank you.

*regarding the question of _____

* in response to the question raised by the distinguished representative _____