



Towards the Full Exercise of Human Rights

Workshop on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

THE REALITY OF the exercise of human rights of people with disabilities is a complex one. Our understanding of those rights frequently needs to be reviewed. In fulfillment of its mandate, Disability Rights Promotion International – Canada (DRPI – Canada) held a one-day workshop on November 10, 2009, about the existing relationships between the implementation of economic, social and cultural rights, and the daily lives of people with disabilities. This event, held in Québec City, was made possible by the collaboration of the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research in Rehabilitation and Social Integration (CIRRIS), L'Institut de Réadaptation en Déficience Physique de Québec (IRDQP), and Regroupement des personnes des organisations de handicapées de la région 03 (ROP 03) and with the financial support of Canadian Heritage.

The keynote address was given by Marc Bilcoq from the Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse du Québec (Québec Human Rights Commission). The subject of his speech was the Charte québécoise des droits et libertés de la personne (Québec Code) and its role in fighting discrimination against people with disabilities. Mr. Bilcoq focused his keynote address on the situation of people with disabilities with regard to integration and retention at work as well as broader discrimination. He insisted on the measure of protection granted by the provisions of Article 48 of the Québec Code counter to the exploitation of people with disabilities and elderly people.

The remainder of the day was devoted to the presentation of economic, social and cultural rights. A DRPI – Canada training guide was distributed to the participants with the financial support of Canadian Heritage. Then, the moderator

introduced the participants to the universal and indivisible character of human rights. He explained what the consequences of such a perspective on our understanding of disability were and expanded on the discrimination that people with disabilities face on a regular basis. Participants were reminded that the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities does not grant them any specific human rights: It advances a differentiated implementation of human rights so that it can respond to their social, economic, political and cultural realities. The moderator explained that having disabilities or functional and behavioral differences cannot justify any privation of human rights.

Participants were then given more information about the underlying human rights principles: dignity, autonomy, non-discrimination and equality, participation, inclusion and accessibility, and respect for difference. Some denounced the current living conditions of people with disabilities in spite of international conventions and the Québec Code. A long discussion followed about the main difficulties people with disabilities face when accomplishing their ordinary activities. Deaf people commented on the existing obstacles many of them have to come up against when they need sign language interpretation services. They underlined that this situation, combined with the weakness of the Langue des signes du Québec training program, is putting their existence, as a social minority group, in jeopardy.

Through the day, participants brought to light the existing gap between their formal economic, social and cultural rights and the accomplishment of their ordinary activities in the community. Many recalled the importance of social struggle to ensure equality rights and the exercise of human rights. It was in such a

spirit that participants came to tackle the issues surrounding the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was adopted by the United Nations in December 2006, but not ratified by Canada. They talked about the universal character of the Convention and the exercise of human rights, as well as its capacity to be implemented while ensuring respect for differences, for example, using sign language to communicate. Recognition of the differences between people with disabilities is vital because they constitute a heterogeneous social-group embracing diversity in their experiences.

The DRPI – Canada human rights monitoring project aims to make people with disabilities and the organizations representing them more aware of existing human rights and the importance of monitoring their implementation within their communities themselves. The workshop ended with a discussion around monitoring mechanisms that should be put in place for the acknowledgement of human rights violations, as well as the kinds of instruments that have been developed by DRPI – Canada. Everyone agreed that every person with or without disabilities belongs to humankind and is a holder of rights, and that the full exercise of their human rights cannot be obtained without a social struggle for the recognition of equality rights.

For more information about DRPI – Canada, visit www.yorku.ca/drpi.

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