

# Nagpur Inter-Faith Declaration on Disability

“We the seventy adherents including those with Disabilities (PWDs) hailing from different faith traditions and walks of life as clerics, theologians, academicians, practitioners representing the traditions of Baha'i, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Indigenous community, Islam, Jainism and Sikhism assembled at Nagpur to have an Interfaith Roundtable on Disability between August 07 and 09 2017 under the aegis of National Council of Churches in India - Indian Ecumenical Disability Accompaniment (NCCI -IDEA), World Council of Churches - Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network, Spalding Trust, Church of Ireland, World Vision India and Christian Service Agency send this declaration for the benefit of all adherents belonging to all World faiths.

We conversed on how religions and faiths look at PWDs; deliberated upon the status and place accorded by Holy Scriptures to PWDs, what are the views of Gods on PWDs, as God's view on PWDs described in different holy / faith scriptures. We have also dialogued about the role of faith communities in promoting and inculcating the culture of inclusion among the Faith Communities and Societies.

Hence, we the participants of the Round Table would like to issue the following Interfaith Declaration on Disability from the unique learning experiences drawn from the round table:

- Religions are essentially divine. Prophets/ Messengers / Avatars / Gods of different faiths have disseminated divine precepts for human societies which in turn have constructed them to organize their lives on earth. Religions believe that the creations are part of the divine therefore probably whole and worthy of divine and human compassion equally. They command us to lead a just and inclusive life and form community based on love and humanity/equality.
- Faith and religious traditions seems to view all creations within the framework of Cartesian dichotomy as good and bad, right and wrong, success and failure, desirable and despicable. Such qualifying notions coupled with hierarchical social arrangement and legitimize moral codes that are discriminatory unjust and exclusive, experienced by PWD's throughout history.
- A PWD is usually stereotyped as one who is less than normal, is deemed to be at the receiving end in need of compassionate assistance. Religious people and faith-based organizations often mercilessly deny PWDs their legitimate space in active and creative life.
- In the name of tradition and culture, the faith communities in general to be condescending towards the PWDs, and in few extreme cases even demonize the physical appearances of their bodies and their desire to live dignified lives. Rather they are not to be objects of programmes but the subject of relationships.
- Such contexts call the faith communities and adherents at large for deeper introspection and transformation so that religious traditions cease to be agents of prejudice and discrimination.
- The divine spirit enshrined in religions prompt us to share with one another dignity and equality, while accepting differences and celebrating diverse lives as part of the divine whole.

Hence, we understand that humans are manifestations of the divine that all must be allowed to celebrate their lives through just, responsible and transparent inclusive relationships. Such transcending love, inclusiveness, recognitions and acceptance of people with differences and their families contribute to the holistic growth of human societies and the realization of the Divine in our lives.

We also recognize that different physical and intellectual challenges are a part of the created order. We see this diversity in the wider community of all life.

It is in this context that we appreciate the State Policies, that affirm the Rights of PWDs and promote the principle of inclusion in society, by upholding the fundamental human rights to a life of dignity and non-discrimination for all citizens as enshrined in the Constitution.

We appeal to all the Religions and Faith Based Organizations and Religious Heads to uphold the constitutional rights of all citizens including PWDs.

Therefore, we, the followers of different religious and faith traditions, solemnly declare that:

1. We affirm the innate potential of our respective religions / faith practices to enable us to recognize the “divine” design in one another and to inculcate loving human relationships of equality.
2. We condemn stigmatization, discrimination of PWD’s as morally unacceptable wherever or by whomever it is being practiced.
3. We recognize the need to create awareness within our religious communities on issues of Disability towards transforming our communities to be inclusive.
4. We discern the need to relearn our traditions and rituals, festivals, feasts and practices in the light of the divinity to purge them of all exclusive propensity.
5. We respect the scriptures of all traditions and encourage inclusive interpretations of the same on religious places of celebration, rituals, practices, festivity and feasts.
6. We pledge to accompany PWD friends and families who are excluded from participating, performing and leading the faith based activities due to their physical and mental conditions and extend to them spiritual fellowship and solidarity in their yearning to be normal and right to live with dignity.
7. We commit ourselves to transform all our common places of worship into a welcoming, accessible and compatible space for PWDs.
8. We dedicate ourselves to safeguard the rights of all PWDs and to join hands with all civil society initiatives that strive for Just and Inclusive Communities.
9. We call upon religious leaders to preach inclusivity and to practice non-discriminatory employment policies in their institutions, and also to engage in affirmative action to end discrimination that PWDs face as in admissions and appointments.
10. We resolve to work incessantly to create just and inclusive communities with consistent practice of values of inclusion, compassion, justice and acceptance so that the divine image (blessing) of God will be celebrated in all diverse manifestations.

We invite all faith leaders and adherents to join the pilgrimage towards Just and Inclusive Communities with possible interventions that uphold the dignity, defend rights and unite all of us for the cause of PWDs.

Adopted by:  
The Participants of the Interfaith Round Table on Disability  
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Nagpur, India.  
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