

IYDP (International Year of Disabled Persons)

Disabled or Handicapped ?

The International Year of Disabled Persons (IYDP) 1981, following the International Year of the Child 1979 and the International Year of Women, 1975, aims to create and spread general awareness regarding the problems of the disabled just as the former two international years tried to spread general awareness regarding the problems of women and children all over the world.

There is, however, a central idea which the organizers of IYDP are trying to emphasize. In the introduction given by Mrs. S.N. K'nanzo (a sociologist from Zaïre), executive secretary of IYDP, to "News from the IYDP Secretariat", August 1980, no. 2, pp. 3-6, the main objective of this year consists in the recognition of the difference between "disabled" and "handicapped". Those who suffer from physical or mental disabilities are not so much handicapped by their actual disabilities as by the handicaps of all kinds that society creates for them. These handicaps which take the form of stereotyped, hostile attitudes, tend to create in the disabled an inferiority complex and prevent their integration in society. Studies are being encouraged regarding occupations, jobs and sports that fit each category of disabled people. Methods of rehabilitating them are diligently developed, but more significant is their integration in their communities and more pressing is the need to arouse their talents and hidden resources.

In a study on the disabled in the ECWA Region (Economic Commission for Western Asia), prepared by Dr. Munir Khoury, professor of sociology at Beirut University College, he mentions as one of the handicaps which society creates for the disabled, the concept of fatalism, which means accepting trouble as a pre-destined fate and refusing to struggle against it. The fatalistic attitude represents a static, negativist philosophy which paralyzes action, not only in the field of disabled people but also in all other fields. Unless we replace it by an activist, dynamic philosophy, we shall not be able to achieve progress in any field.

Another handicap raised against the disabled comes from the cherished, traditional values of "charity" and "mercy" towards the unprivileged in general. Charity and mercy are two important driving forces in social activity but once applied with a feeling of a superior helping an inferior, or a privileged person assisting an unprivileged one, they will end in inflating the donor's ego and crushing the receiver's personality. Giving on a charity basis, which does not allow the receiver to give something in return, cannot go on endlessly. The receiver must feel that he is sharing in some activity and is not only a passive "absorbent", if we want him to preserve his human dignity. The donor must realize that what he is giving is but a part of his duty as a citizen; the gift should help to rehabilitate the receiver; otherwise his action is pseudo-humanitarian, leading to no positive result.

This second handicap is closely related to a third one resulting from our people's negative attitude toward work. While in developed countries work is respected and appreciated for its own sake, without regard to its nature or

its financial value, here in the Arab countries we claim top positions for unqualified candidates. We covet responsible intellectual work for people with inadequate intellectual training, because we consider manual work below their dignity. According to Dr. Munir Khoury, many disabled persons shy away from learning simple skills because they, or their families, feel above "simple, unimportant work". Many of the so-called "high-class" families with feeble-minded children usually prefer locking them in rather than giving them a chance to learn simple vocations and help them to lead a healthy, productive life.

The above are some of the points which we should bear in mind when discussing the objectives of IYDP in the Arab countries. They represent long term considerations while the curative and rehabilitative measures and services represent the short term ones. Both types, however, are interrelated and have to go hand in hand. Radical changes in people's lives are impossible without a radical change in their mentality and a careful reconsideration of their values.

When I Killed My Love

by Nazik al-Malaika

And I hated you, only hatred
 Became my passion,
 It engulfed my to-morrow,
 Absorbed my to-day,
 Was fed by the fire of my curses,
 And the embers of my revolt.
 It was lulled by my cry of grudge
 In a gloomy song,
 Nourished by a profound sleep
 With ghosts of darkness dancing around.

I hated your cursed name, its echos, its shadow,
 I hated its color, its tune, rhythm and form,
 Those ugly, harsh memories
 Fell like a heap, joined eternity in one sudden stroke,
 Mirthfully I was transformed into a morning poem,
 Yesterday, I said, is no more than a hollow dream.

My triumph was complete, your statue
 crumbled down, thrust into the abyss,
 Joyful I hurried to bury its remains
 Under the sad cypress tree,
 The shovel in my hand savagely digging the earth,
 It fell upon a corpse, awesome and cold,
 Proudly I dragged it to the light.
 What did I see? The dead parts of regret!
 Night offered a mirror through which I saw my hate
 And my dead past, but failed to see myself,
 I had already killed you in my night and in my cup,
 I was slowly escorting the dead to its grave,
 Then I could plainly see, with horror in my eyes,
 That I had killed none but myself!

Collection, "Qararat-ul-Mawja"
 (Depths of the Wave). 1952,
 Trans. from Arabic.