



PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION
WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION



47th DIRECTING COUNCIL
58th SESSION OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE

Washington, D.C., USA, 25-29 September 2006

Provisional Agenda Item 4.8

CD47/15, Corrig. (Eng.)
25 September 2006
ENGLISH ONLY

**DISABILITY: PREVENTION AND REHABILITATION IN THE CONTEXT OF
THE RIGHT TO THE ENJOYMENT OF THE HIGHEST ATTAINABLE
STANDARD OF PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND OTHER RELATED
RIGHTS**

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16 August 2006

ORIGINAL: SPANISH

DISABILITY: PREVENTION AND REHABILITATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE RIGHT TO THE ENJOYMENT OF THE HIGHEST ATTAINABLE STANDARD OF PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND OTHER RELATED RIGHTS

The United Nations Organization estimates that there are approximately 600 million persons with disabilities world wide, some 400 million of whom are in the developing countries. The Region of the Americas has roughly 60 million persons with disabilities.

Longer life expectancy, the increase in noncommunicable diseases, emerging and reemerging diseases, growing violence, armed conflicts; accidents of all types, and the use and abuse of alcohol, tobacco, and banned substances are among the main causes of disability. Thus, there is no clear decline in their prevalence in the general population. The result will be greater demand for care in services and programs that up to now have been insufficient.

This document suggests that the problem of disability must be approached as a social responsibility and not as an individual one; a view that is grounded in the recommendations of the 2005 World Health Assembly (Resolution WHA58.23), which recognize the need to promote and protect the human rights of persons with disabilities, among other recommendations. This document can serve as an important tool to help the Executive Committee learn about the situation of persons with disabilities in the Region and consider different strategies for disability prevention consistent with international instruments and guidelines that promote the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health¹ and other related rights of such persons. The Executive Committee examined this document and adopted Resolution CE138.R11 (see Annex), which it submits for the consideration of the Directing Council.

¹ The Member States of WHO adopted important principles in regard to public health that are enshrined in the preamble to its Constitution. Hence, the Constitution establishes as a fundamental international principle that enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is not only a state or condition of the individual, but "... one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition ...". The Constitution was adopted by the International Health Conference, held in New York from 19 June to 22 July 1946 and signed on 22 July 1946 by the representatives of 61 States. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights likewise states that "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family..." The International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (UN), in turn, protects "...the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health..." (Article 12), and the Protocol of San Salvador (OAS) protects "the right to health" (Article 10). Moreover, health protection as a human right is enshrined in 18 of the 35 Constitutions of the Member States of PAHO (Bolivia, Brazil, Cuba, Chile, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela).

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