

DATE: XX/XX/XX

Dear Mr. Zoellick,

As the World Bank embarks on its two-year process of updating and reviewing its social and environmental Safeguard Policies, we, members and supporters of the global disability community, would like to take this opportunity to share our views on the scope of this review process. In particular, we would like to bring to your attention our urgent request for ensuring the integration of issues of disability and inclusive development into the revised Safeguards.

First, allow us to welcome this important review process as an opportunity for the Bank to strengthen its Safeguard policies that have acted as standards for other international institutions and client governments since they were first established. Given this position, the Bank has a clear responsibility to uphold the highest of standards when it comes to social policies. Moreover, many of the Bank's clients are signatories of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and we expect that they will turn to the Bank for guidance on implementing this Convention. It is in this spirit that we hope the Bank would become a leader in establishing the necessity of explicitly incorporating social inclusion and disability rights into development practices by ensuring that all relevant Bank-funded projects are systematically inclusive in design and implementation.

According to the World Health Organization and the World Bank, persons with disabilities make up around 15% of the world's population or over 1 billion people, 80% of whom live in developing countries (World Report on Disability). Data in the aforementioned report also shows that children with disabilities in developing countries are significantly less likely to attend school and therefore have fewer employment opportunities available to them. Poverty and disability are intrinsically linked, not only because of the lack of economic opportunities available for persons with disabilities but also because poverty increases the likelihood of a person becoming disabled due to malnutrition or lack of adequate healthcare. In fact, according to a study by the Social Protection Unit at the Bank, 1 in every 5 poor people is disabled (Poverty and Disability: A Survey of the Literature, 1999). Given that the World Bank's mandate is to reduce poverty and given the cross-cutting nature of the rights of persons with disabilities, it is not only critical but also in the interest of the Bank to explicitly and systematically become more inclusive in its work.

A review conducted by the disability and development unit shows that around two-thirds of Bank projects in social protection over the past 10 years included disability components. This is very positive and shows that more development practitioners at the Bank and more borrowing governments are willing and capable of addressing the needs of disabled persons. However, as noted, this review refers to social protection projects only, and that is where much of the success lies. While social protection work is essential in ensuring the protection of persons with disabilities, it does not ensure their full inclusion as active and equal participants of society contributing to the development process.

While we applaud the important efforts by the Bank's disability and development unit and other Bank staff to promote and design inclusive projects in various sectors, these efforts have been scattered and often inconsistent given that there is no mandate for the systematic inclusion of disability into Bank

operations. There do indeed exist guidelines and best practices for task team leaders to follow, but these notes are not mandatory and it is arguably up to individual Bank staff to design more inclusive projects.

As the leading multilateral institution in international development, it is important that the Bank adopt a clearer and more explicit approach on the issue of integrating disability rights and inclusive development into its operations. We think that the Bank's Safeguards provide the appropriate framework to do so because they constitute binding policies that are applied to all projects when relevant. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities provides a great reference for inclusive language that could be used in the Safeguard policies and doing so would be in line with the Bank's mandate to uphold high social standards and its responsibility towards its client governments. Consequently, we strongly urge the Bank's leadership to undertake the following necessary measures:

Clear stand-alone policy: It is essential to establish a clear stand-alone Safeguard policy which guarantees inclusive development design and implementation as well as the engagement of persons with disabilities and their organizations throughout the project cycle. Examples of when this policy would be triggered would include, but not necessarily be limited to, projects which fall into the sectors of transportation and tourism, building infrastructure; communication and information technology infrastructure; social programs such as education and health; and reconstruction work in the aftermath of disasters.

Strengthening language in all Safeguard policies: Currently, the Bank implicitly considers the needs and rights of persons with disabilities among those of vulnerable groups in the Safeguards such as in the Involuntary Resettlement policy. But it is critical that the needs and rights of persons with disabilities are explicitly ensured in all relevant policies to ensure protection and participation of *all* people, and not just some.

While these above noted measures would provide the necessary mandate for Bank staff to design more inclusive projects, they are insufficient by themselves; the Bank, therefore, would need to develop its capacity to effectively operationalize these policies. We are fully committed to establishing and maintaining meaningful and close collaboration with the Bank throughout this process and many of the undersigned can offer unique technical and consultative assistance to the World Bank on this matter. In addition, building on the information that the disability and development unit already has, we can help compile a host of existing information and substantial examples about best practices in inclusive development. Sharing such best practices aims at enhancing the Bank's mandate and commitment towards the respect of the socio-economic rights of persons with disabilities, and ultimately ensuring the explicit integration of this commitment into the Safeguard policies as an independent scope as well as in the form of clear and strong language in other Safeguards.

We look forward to receiving your positive response, and we thank you very much in advance for your kind collaboration.

Sincerely,

Mohammed ali Loutfy

The Lebanese Physical Handicapped Union (LPHU)

Website: www.lphu.com

Full collection of petition signatures will be included here.