

Hundreds march in Qacha'snek to celebrate international day of persons with disabilities

By Rabasotho Moeletsi

Hundreds of persons with disabilities gathered in Qacha'snek to on Wednesday, 03rd December 2014 to celebrate international day of persons with disabilities. Since 1992, this event is recognized by the United Nations with the aim to promote an understanding of disability issues and mobilize support for the dignity, rights and well-being of persons with disabilities.

Around nine hundred (900) people participated in a march from District Administrator across the Qacha'snek town in support of equal opportunities for persons with various disabilities. Then followed the formal session in speeches from dignitaries who included Her Majesty Queen, `Masenate Mohato Seeiso, Minister of Social Development, Hon. `Matebatso Doti, Member of Parliament for Qacha'snek, Dr. `Matumelo Sekatle, Chairperson of the Lesotho National Federation of Organisations of the Disabled, Mrs. `Makananelo Regina Lephoi, and the US Embassy Representative. Also present was Dr. Nthabiseng Makoae, who is the deputy minister of health.

The theme for this year celebration was "Sustainable development: the promise of technology". Making reference to the theme, Mrs. Regina Lephoi, Chairperson of LNFOD said that disability movement in Lesotho welcomes this theme as it comes when technology is seen as an advancement which has increasingly raised the standard of living for people and can be used play a role in bridging the access gap between the disabled and their non-disabled counterparts. So she pleaded with the government of Lesotho to show commitment in implementation of the ICT Policy of 2005 which provides the government shall ensure universal access to ICTs by paying attention to the special needs the disabled.

Delivering her keynote address, Her Majesty Queen, `Masenate Mohato Seeiso, who is also the LNFOD's Patron pointed a few legislation gaps which renders individuals with disabilities vulnerable and emphasized that Lesotho need to act vastly to introspect the current laws and policies in terms of how we enable people with disabilities to participate in the development agenda of Lesotho.

Making reference to the CRPD 2006, she remarks: "Article 4 of the CRPD, calls upon the member states such as Lesotho to remove, modify and eliminate all laws and policies that

discriminate against people with disabilities. However, we are not complying so well in this regard.”

She continued, “Section 57 of the constitution provides that, Deaf people are not eligible to be appointed as senators because they are not able to speak. In addition, National assembly electoral amendment act of 2011 prevents people with intellectual disabilities from participating in the general elections on the basis that, they are not able to make independent decision for themselves.”

While the Queen acknowledged government for ongoing development of National disability plan and the Disability Equity Law, she emphasized the fact that these two documents can impact the lives of disabled people only if the government makes financial resources available for implementation of these instruments.

On behalf of the government, the minister of social development, Hon. `Matebatso Doti said that as the ministry responsible for disability issues they have started some projects for persons with disabilities to enable them to be self-employed as it is not every person who could be hired at government service.

The crowd was entertained by the healthy line up the featured the likes of the renowned Gospel singer with disabilities Mr. Majara Majara, the group formed by inmates of Qacha'snek district, not forgetting the local dancers of the ‘Setapo dance’ which is the style only found in Qacha'snek.