

UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC
AND
SOCIAL COUNCIL



LIMITED
E/CEPAL/Conf.72/L.5
30 September 1980
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: FRENCH

CEPAL

Economic Commission for Latin America

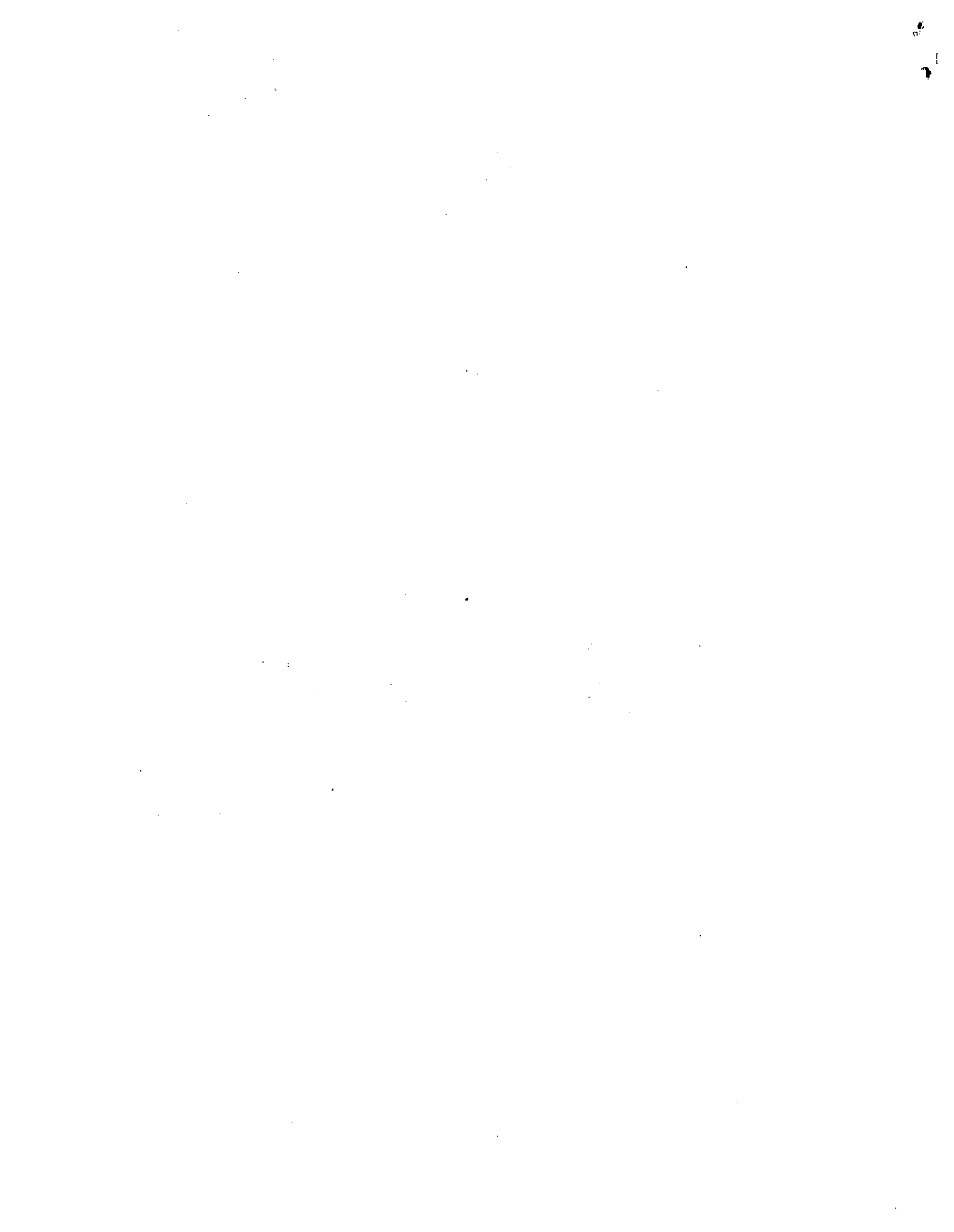
Preparatory Activities for the International Year
for Disabled Persons (1981)

Regional Technical Meeting and Regional Seminar

Santiago, Chile, 5-11 November 1980

PRELIMINARY DRAFT FOR THE LONG-TERM WORLD PLAN OF ACTION

Prepared by the United Nations Secretariat in accordance
with the terms of General Assembly resolution 34/154
of 17 December 1979 entitled "International Year
for Disabled Persons"



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INTRODUCTION

1. The international community has taken the position that the situation of the majority of disabled and mentally retarded persons, the total number of whom in the world was estimated at 450 million at the beginning of 1979, is unacceptable both in terms of humanitarian consideration and in terms of social progress and development. In order to improve this situation, the General Assembly and a number of legislative organs of specialized agencies such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have adopted various declarations and recommendations. However, the main problem is the implementation of these declarations and recommendations, and that is why a world plan of action for disabled persons has been recommended.

2. The world plan of action may be approached in two ways: either as a document based on an analysis of communications received from Member States, specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations; or as a document focused on a number of priority problems for which solutions may be found through international co-operation.

I. Aim and scope of the world plan of action

3. The chief aim of the plan is to propose concrete measures which could contribute to bringing about a radical change in the situation of disabled persons in all aspects of living. As it is impossible to solve all the problems and change everything at once, it will be necessary to lay down priorities. In this context, the second alternative given in the introduction, in paragraph 2, seems preferable if a real, progressive change in the situation of disabled persons is to be achieved. The preliminary draft plan below is based on that assumption: the international community would concentrate on certain problems suitable for consultation and joint action,

for which solutions can be found through international co-operation. The preparation of the plan of action will necessarily reflect the views expressed by Governments, specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations. Thus the choice of priority problems is crucial in order to limit the scope of the world plan of action.

4. The scope of the plan. Taking into account the preliminary consultations which have already taken place, the Secretary-General proposes the consideration of the following four aspects:

(1) The humanitarian aspect, relating to the problems arising from all the various kinds of legal and de facto discrimination which result in disabled and mentally retarded persons not being treated equally with other members of society;

(2) The psychological aspect, relating to negative public attitudes towards disabled and mentally retarded persons;

(3) The lack of measures for the prevention of disabilities;

(4) The aspect of participation, relating to the problems of equality and the equalization of opportunities between disabled persons and able-bodied persons in the development process.

5. So as to facilitate assessment of progress made in the implementation of the world plan of action, the international community might envisage short-term, medium-term and long-term measures. In that case, national, regional and international machinery should be set up to evaluate progress and also the obstacles encountered.

Comments on chapter I

In accordance with the General Assembly resolutions and the recommendations of the Advisory Committee for the International Year of Disabled Persons, the Secretary-General would like to receive further opinions and suggestions regarding the aim and scope of the plan of action above.

II. Fundamental principles on which the plan of action should be based

6. The international community has already set forth certain principles such as those contained in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Declaration on Social Progress and Development, the Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons and the Declaration of the Rights of Disabled Persons. In addition, a number of recommendations, resolutions and agreements have been made by the specialized agencies: ILO on vocational rehabilitation, WHO on mental retardation and the prevention of disability and UNESCO on special education.

7. Some fundamental principles contained in these international instruments could constitute the basis for the plan of action. The following may be considered essential:

(1) Respect for the dignity and worth of the human person (Preamble of the Charter of the United Nations);

(2) The settlement of international disputes by peaceful means with a view to maintaining international peace and security (Charter of the United Nations, Article 2);

(3) Guaranteeing everyone the right to work and to participate in useful and productive labour (Declaration on Social Progress and Development, Article 6).

Comments on chapter II

The Secretary-General considers that it is for the Governments and organizations concerned to choose the basic principles governing the long-term plan of action for disability prevention and the rehabilitation of disabled persons. He would welcome suggestions and comments on the matter. Please give the reference text for each principle submitted.

III. Organization of the plan and specific measures

3. If agreement is reached that the plan could be based on the four aspects listed above, the specific measures to be taken in each of these spheres at national, regional and international level would need to be indicated. Bearing in mind that the resolutions of the General Assembly and all the recommendations of the Advisory Committee for the International Year of Disabled Persons stress that the major focus of effective change should be at national level, the Plan of Action must be geared to the priority problems identified by Member States.

9. A. Humanitarian aspect

(a) Problems. What is involved is the moral responsibility and solidarity of any society. Given that disabled persons suffer from various forms of legal and de facto social discrimination, society must take measures to eradicate this discrimination, as a humanitarian duty dictated by the social conscience. Here it is not a question of the economic benefits to be derived from the work of disabled persons and the mentally retarded. The social conscience obliges communities to take responsibility for disabled persons and the mentally retarded and to treat them humanely even if some of them are "uneconomic" in that they will never be able to participate actively in the development process. It is basically a question of human dignity.

10. (aa) Measures proposed. First, there is a need for accession to existing international instruments and, where appropriate, their ratification.

- "Affirmative action" legislation could be adopted to allow the progressive eradication of all existing forms of discrimination against disabled persons and the mentally retarded. To this end, a national commission could be established to examine existing laws. The commission would bring all discriminatory legal and juridical provisions concerning disabled persons to the attention of the legislative authorities which would then take concrete measures to introduce the changes needed.

- Special rehabilitation centres and institutions could be set up for disabled persons and the mentally retarded.

Comments on chapter III (A) concerning problems of discrimination against disabled persons and the mentally retarded.

11. B. The psychological aspect

(b) Problems. The problems concern the changing of public attitudes towards disabled persons. These discriminatory attitudes derive from the stereotypes created by society. Society must therefore correct these attitudes through intensive programmes to inform and educate the public so that society takes into account the human rights of disabled persons. These problems are also linked to mental structures and the value systems, usages and customs of each society.

12. (bb) Measures proposed. A code of conduct might be adopted to ensure a "correct" and appropriate attitude towards disabled persons on the part of public opinion. The negative attitudes of passivity, pity, shame and scorn for disabled persons are a stumbling block to the development and integration of disabled persons in society. The causes of such public attitudes must be eradicated; one may mention, for example, the importance of the basic education received from earliest childhood. School and the mass media, inter alia, should be used to promote changes in certain customs and traditions which lead to discriminatory attitudes.

Comments and suggestions on chapter III (B) concerning the problems of public attitudes towards disabled persons.

C. The lack of preventive measures

13. (c) Problems. There is a need to attack the direct causes of disabilities due to social negligence in regard to nutrition, medicine, schooling, job training, human settlements, etc. This negligence exists in the highly industrialized countries as well as in the developing countries. However, the developing countries have potentially more disabled persons, bearing in mind hunger, malnutrition, the inadequacy of primary health care and the like. National plans should be based on the principle that "prevention is better than cure" and place maximum emphasis on the preventive measures needed so that societies no longer produce disabled persons.

14. (cc) Specific measures. Investment in prevention policies will always prove to be less expensive in the long term than investment in "treatment". The following should be organized and financed:

- Poliomyelitis vaccination campaigns;
- Road safety campaigns;
- Programmes for inculcating in the public, particularly young people, the ideals of peace and the settlement of disputes by peaceful means.

Comments and suggestions on chapter III (C) concerning the lack of preventive measures.

15. D. Participation in the development process

Problems. For the plan of action to be realistic, distinctions must be made between types of disability and there is a need for a fairly precise idea of the proportion of disabled and mentally retarded persons who are capable of participating fully in the development process and of those whose disabilities make this impossible. The former, making up the

majority, constitute human resources that must be actively involved in national, regional and international life. The effective participation of disabled persons is linked to equality of opportunity for them, taking into account not the humanitarian aspect but society's interest in not wasting part of its human resources. This participation must take place in all sectors: cultural, social, economic and political. The importance of the problem of the productivity of human resources in the economic development process must be stressed. The developing countries have human resources which, if well trained and used, could greatly accelerate the economic development process in these countries. With effective training, these human resources could offer a higher productivity and create conditions more favourable to the establishment of a new international economic order.

16. (dd) Specific measures. The plan will not be able to provide for measures to cure each disabled person of his disability. It might be limited to attacking the particular conditions which lead to disabled persons having a marginal role. In the case of persons who are already severely disabled and not integrated in the development progress, it is necessary to minimize the loss while realizing that it is impossible to do everything. The choice of priorities, taking into account available resources, is once again crucial. In the interests of development, an effort must be made to profit from the capacity for production and creativity of disabled persons. For this purpose, on the lines of what happens in the case of able-bodied persons, the many private initiatives that may be taken by the people concerned, i.e. disabled persons, to enable themselves to work with dignity in an occupation should be encouraged morally and financially. Various trade apprenticeship centres should be set up, accessible to disabled persons.

17. With regard to disabled children and young persons, special efforts are needed to invest in school equipment for special education from primary to university level. The same applies to leisure pursuits: sport, the theatre, the cinema, etc. Investment in housing, school and administrative

buildings, human settlements in general and the communications and road, rail, sea and air transport infrastructure will have to be envisaged so that disabled people have access to the same employment possibilities and leisure facilities as the able-bodied.

18. Scientific and technological research that will lead to the invention of techniques specially for the disabled must be encouraged and industry must be persuaded to produce appropriate equipment facilitating the integration of disabled persons in the development process.

Comments and suggestions on chapter III (D) concerning participation in the development process.

19. Conclusions

It is important to promulgate legislation and regulations designed to eradicate discrimination against disabled persons and the mentally retarded; the drafting of a code of conduct on positive attitudes towards the disabled is also important; but the adoption of concrete preventive measures on the basis of precise projects programmed under a three-year, five-year or ten-year plan is something more positive, although expensive. As to curative measures to correct social negligence, they are much more expensive still. It is precisely because of the excessive cost of financing such projects that the plan of action has been recommended by the General Assembly so that regional and international co-operation may supplement national and unilateral efforts in the harmonization of plans and, especially, the financing of projects designed to speed up effective changes in the day-to-day lives of the disabled and mentally retarded.

20. A number of Governments have already expressed a wish to see the long-term plan of action drawn up on the basis of statistical data reflecting the situation of disabled persons. In order to collect these data, a questionnaire has recently been communicated to Member States, specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations. The information provided by the Governments and organizations concerned in reply to the questionnaire will be extremely useful to the Secretariat in implementing the recommendations of the General Assembly.

