

Dr. Hessa's Remarks
Assistive Technology for the Visually Impaired Forum
Doha, Qatar
December 3, 2008

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

I am delighted to see so many of you here in recognition of International Day of Persons with Disabilities. The work you already do to help people with disabilities in the fields of education, social welfare, rehabilitation, and sports is inspirational.

The theme chosen by the United Nations for this year's International Day is "Dignity and Justice for all of us" – a theme well suited for the topic of this forum. We will spend a few hours exploring how the power of technology promises a more dignified life for those challenged by mental and physical disabilities.

Today we are connected as never before to our colleagues, family, and friends. ICT improves how we live and work in countless ways. Technology has become so integral to nearly everything we hardly give it a thought anymore. It is simply everywhere, making our lives easier, more efficient, and more meaningful.

But all of us in Qatar have a responsibility to ensure that the miracle of technology is for everybody, not just a select few. Too often, here as well as throughout the world, the technology that makes that communication possible is not accessible to the disabled. That means the benefits of ICT are not equally shared.

At ictQATAR, we profoundly believe that in this evolving world, the rights of knowledge and connectivity are fundamental to every citizen. We believe ICT is an equalizer in society – it serves to remove dividing lines between those who have and those who have not. Providing ICT access to the disabled serves the same role, offering the chance to compensate for physical or functional limitations.

Our goal to broaden access, to provide that fundamental right of knowledge and connectivity to the disabled, is part of Qatar's effort to build a more just society.

To help guide us toward achieving this goal, we have established an Accessibility Working Group of experts to set policies and mechanisms to provide the necessary technology to persons with disabilities in Qatar. Some of the group members are among us in the audience.

And I am also proud to announce that ictQATAR website is now fully accessible to persons with visual, hearing, motor and cognitive impairments. My hope is every government body in Qatar will follow our lead.

Today's Forum on Assistive Technology for the Visually Impaired is a way to help all of us play a role in advancing the independence of disabled people.

I look forward to working with all of you to create opportunities for assistive technologies in the good work you do, and to help create awareness in the community about how technology improves lives – the lives of every single person – in order to make Qatar an example of dignity and justice for all.

Thank you.