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PRESS RELEASE

**BLAST's Constitutional Conversations:
Dialogue on Strengthening Initiatives for Disability Inclusion
in Public and Private Sector, Judiciary and NGOs**

Speakers at a webinar on 'Ensuring Disability Rights – Learning from the South' called for more concerted action to ensure inclusion of people with disabilities in the public and private sector and in the judiciary. Speakers from Bangladesh, India, and Kenya highlighted examples of how local, national and international institutions have shaped their practices to ensure inclusion of people with disabilities, furthering constitutional commitments to equality. They highlighted best practices, challenges, and the scope for learning and collaboration across the Global South.

Md. Kamrul Islam Chowdhury, Director (Institution), Department of Social Services of the Government of Bangladesh said, 'The Ministry of Social Welfare is working with people with disabilities on vocational and skill development trainings. In Gazipur, approximately 2500 persons with disabilities are now working after this training'. He welcomed the initiatives for the private sector and NGOs to come forward to employ persons with disabilities, and highlighted the importance of continuing modification of policies to be disability friendly, and for infrastructure to be accessible for persons with disabilities.

Prof. Lawrence Murugu Mute, of the University of Nairobi, Kenya, underscored the need for modification and modernization of both systems and policies. He highlighted positive actions by Kenya's judiciary including the acceptance of persons with disabilities in the mainstream. He also urged all concerned to take action to comply with the '[International Principles and Guidelines on Access to Justice for Persons with Disabilities](#)' adopted by the UN Human Rights Council in 2022 and based on these principles the State Parties should take all necessary action to ensure the rights of the Person with Disabilities.

Nasima Akhter, President, National Council of Disabled Women, highlighted the continuing challenges faced by women with disabilities with respect to employment. She called for family counseling as a starting point to ensuring disability friendly work environments, accessible public transport and proper implementation of existing quotas for enabling persons with disabilities to enter employment.

Vashkar Bhattacharjee, Vice-Chair of the Internet Society Accessibilities Standing Group, welcomed the Government's recent ratification of the Marrakesh Treaty, and progressive measures to ensure reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities so that workplaces could be accessible and materials needed for effective work, with results such as 70% of websites now being accessible for person with disabilities. Reviewing private sector initiatives.

Murteza Rafi Khan, CEO of the Bangladesh Business and Disability Network, said, 'The commitment of the Senior management in both the private and public sector are instrumental in ensuring disability inclusion. They become internal champions for the issue and can also inspire others through external

advocacy and exchange of best practices. It is a key driver behind why some institutes are working well on disability inclusion and others are not.'

Among international rights organisations, **Nawmi Naz Chowdhury**, representing ARROW, Malaysia, urged action to ensure the inclusion of women with disabilities in workplaces, while **Mosharraf Hossain**, of Global Inclusion Consulting, called for increasing self-employment opportunities, to enable people with disabilities to enter the job market, and to develop their skills to survive the employment market.

Discussing the legal frameworks for the protection of disability rights, **Advocate Khondokar Shahrir Shakir** noted the advances made in Bangladesh, and updating of the Bangladesh Civil Service Rules to include persons with disabilities, and expressed hopes that the pending public interest litigation regarding the disability exclusion in the Bangladesh Judicial Service Rules may result in progressive changes.

Rajive Raturi, of the Human Rights Law Network, India, reviewed how extensive public interest litigation before the higher courts in India had resulted in significant changes, including with respect to recruitment in the public sector and through PILs in high courts and supreme courts we have been able to get backlog vacancies filled in. On a PIL which challenged non-implementation of the scheme on reservations in employment filled in. Air travel is now much easier as airports now have to provide ambulifts, wheelchairs, and floor walkers, online reservation is made easier with airlines' websites becoming accessible for PwDs, no physical handling of passengers with disability and no removal of prosthesis and orthosis during security checks. Another PIL has resulted in driving licences being given to deaf persons who were earlier denied driving licences.

Background:

The webinar was organized by the Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust as part of its *Constitutional Conversations* series, marking the 50th anniversary of the promulgation of the Constitution of Bangladesh, by reflecting on people's initiatives on recognition and realization of fundamental rights. **Mohua Pal**, Chairperson of Access Bangladesh Foundation chaired the event, and **Sara Hossain**, ED of BLAST, moderated it.

This webinar has focused on the fundamental right to equality and non-discrimination both in public and private service sectors and how it has been applied to recognize and realise the rights of people with disabilities in Bangladesh. The speakers from Bangladesh, India, and Kenya through their speech highlighted how national and international bodies have shaped and adapted institutional practices to ensure the inclusion of people with disabilities particularly in employment, speaking to their own experiences within government, the private sector, academia, civil society, and international organizations. They also highlighted best practices, challenges, and the scope for learning and collaboration across the South.

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