

**Opening Remarks for Secretary Dr. Aleem Mahmud**  
**National Consultation on the Draft Plan of Action to Support the National Policy for**  
**Persons with Disabilities**

Honourable Ministers, distinguished guests and participants.

I welcome you all to this consultation to finalize the draft National Plan of Action to support the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities. It has been a long road to get to where we are, and we in the Ministry of Social Welfare and Special Education believe we are at the point where it is time to turn deliberations into action.

As you know, the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities was promulgated in 2002, and launched in 2003. Since then, the Ministry has begun the work to see it implemented. Recognizing that progress has been slower than hoped, last June the Government requested that a third party review be undertaken to see what could be done to assess the current status of Persons with Disabilities, and prepare a National Action Plan. The World Bank agreed to contract consultants to conduct the analysis and prepare a draft plan. Since receiving it in June 2004, it has gone through a rigorous revision process with the consultants, been sent to over 100 government, non-government and academic departments and institutions, and comments assimilated.

What you have for our discussion purposes here is the revised draft based on extensive input from many shareholders. What the Ministry is entrusting this esteemed group gathered here to do is assist the MOSWSE ensure three things: (i) that the Plan of Action is appropriate and adequate to address the needs of persons affected with disabilities and their families; (ii) that it is fully implementable with unambiguous priorities; and (iii) that there are clear lines of accountability assigned across ministries, all levels of government, and in the private, NGO and public sectors. How we will work together to achieve the goals of the policy, and how these achievements should be measured are complex matters.

Disability in itself is a complex matter, and its definition controversial. Worldwide studies have cited the range of disability from less than one percent to a high of 20 percent. In Pakistan, there has been great variation among the censuses of 1972, 1981 and 1998. The last census estimated the prevalence in Pakistan at 2.4 percent. Our instinct is that this most likely only covers the more severe forms of disability. Much can be done to address the needs of this population, as well as the broader population affected with more mild and moderate afflictions. We have to change the approach which will not only ensure provision of adequate services, but do whatever it takes to guarantee better social and economic integration. As the Policy itself states, to ensure “full realization of the potential of persons with disabilities through their inclusive mainstreaming.”

I would like to express my thanks to all our partners participating in this workshop. I would like to thank the World Bank for its support through this process, from hiring the consultants who first drafted the NPA to financing this consultation. But mostly, we appreciate the time and effort this respected group of officials and experts has already provided. Thank you and I hope you have a productive encounter.