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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

UNESCO/Emir Jaber al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah Prize to Promote Quality Education for persons with Intellectual Disabilities 2011

Address by

**H.E. Ms Katalin Bogyay
President of the General Conference**

Kuwait, 28 February 2012

Your Excellency Dr. Nayef Falah Al-Hajraf, Minister of Education and Higher Education of Kuwait,

Your Excellency Dr. Ali Ahmad Al Tarrah, Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of Kuwait to UNESCO,

Allow me to thank you for inviting me to this occasion, which is very important for UNESCO since it has a direct bearing on our common endeavor towards quality education for all – an aim that is central to UNESCO's mandate. As you know, inclusiveness is a central component of Education For All goals, set by Dakar Declaration in 2000, meaning that all segments of society should have an equal access to quality education, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions.

Such a high-level recognition of a contribution made in promoting inclusive quality education for persons with intellectual disabilities, is a testament to the dedication of the Government of Kuwait to work together with UNESCO to reward best practices in this area, and to raise the awareness about the issue internationally.

Following the established tradition, the selection of the laureate of the Prize was preceded by a long and careful deliberation by the international jury consisting of highly qualified professionals in the field from different regions of the world. Even a perfunctory look at the biography and accomplishments of the winner of the 2011 Prize makes it clear why the jury decided to nominate Professor Douglas Biklen of Syracuse University for this prestigious award. He is a real pioneer in the field, who has used innovative approaches to challenge dominant ideas about children and youth with intellectual disabilities. His close

collaboration with the various TV and other media have raised the awareness about intellectual disabilities of people who live amongst us, and influenced positive changes in prevailing perceptions of these disabilities. The end result – opening up of general educational settings at all levels to students with intellectual disabilities, is an important contribution to UNESCO’s vision of Education for All. Dr Biklen, I would like to thank you profoundly for your endeavors, and to congratulate you most sincerely on the occasion of receiving this prestigious award.

The outside-of-the-box thinking that has distinguished the career of Dr. Biklen reminds me of a famous Hungarian physician and educator András Pető, who as early as in 1945 developed his innovative conductive educational system, nowadays known as “Peto method”. With this method, he opened up a new way for the rehabilitation of children and adults with disabilities whose dysfunction was due to damages to the central nervous system. He argued that instead of applying special therapies, these people need to be treated through real education, and thus he created the system of conductive education to prove the idea. He was the first to consider disability as an educational challenge and not as a biological problem. He did not share the traditional view of the time that considered injuries to the central nervous system to be irreversible and the disabilities to remain permanent. No case has ever been hopeless either for him or his method, and he has inspired many persons with disabilities and their families. For me, it is very interesting news to learn that Kuwait has adopted Peto methodology in addressing the needs of the persons with disability in the country, which once again reflects the dedication of the Government of Kuwait to promote the welfare of all human beings, including those who have various disabilities.

Much remains to be done globally and at the national level to make sure that the disabled persons are not marginalized in their access to education. Today, disability affects over six hundred and fifty million people around the world, many of whom are excluded from full participation in society. They often have little hope of going to school, getting a job, having their own home, creating a family and raising their children, enjoying a social life or voting.

The impact of disability is particularly significant for children and youth. A widely cited source estimates that 150 million children worldwide live with disabilities, and about four in five children with disabilities live in developing countries. It is also estimated that 98% of children with physical or mental impairments in developing countries do not attend school. In all countries, disabled people may encounter discrimination and barriers to full participation in skills training and employment programmes.

Moreover, the poor countries are disproportionately affected by disability. At all ages, levels of both moderate and severe disability are higher in low- and middle-income countries than in rich countries. They are highest in sub-Saharan Africa.

UNESCO aims to support the full social inclusion of people with disabilities by promoting increased opportunities for them to participate in educational and vocational trainings. Ensuring the opportunities to gain valuable education and skills is about empowering individuals to lead meaningful lives, enhancing the social and economic welfare of their family and community, and fulfilling one of the most fundamental human rights – the right to education, pronounced in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1949.

I would like to once again thank the authorities of Kuwait, and personally His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait, for an exemplary commitment to the cause of promoting quality education for persons with intellectual disabilities, and for a close collaboration with UNESCO in this regard.

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