

# Ableism : what is it?

---

Senator Jordon Steele-John, Parliament of  
Australia

Aiko Akiyama, Social Affairs Officer,  
GESIS, SDD, ESCAP

# Definition of “ableism”

- ✓ “The belief system that underlies the negative attitudes, stereotypes and stigma that devalue persons with disabilities on the basis of their actual or perceived impairments”
- ✓ “Ableism considers persons with disabilities as being less worthy of respect and consideration, less able to contribute and participate, and of less inherent value than others”

UN Disability-Inclusive Communications Guidelines  
[<Disability-Inclusive Communications Guidelines>](#).

# Why important to talk about “ableism”?

As it is

- ✓ A root cause of exclusion of, discrimination against, unconscious bias against persons with disabilities;
- ✓ One of self-internalized self-identify and self-esteem of persons with disabilities; and

Being aware of “ ableism” can;;

- ✓ Motivate all disability stakeholders to review existing policies, programmes, budget, media and culture to truly promote disability inclusion and disability rights;
- ✓ Reflect upon ourselves to change our behaviors and actions.

It is not a term of an intellectual exercise, but is a concept of practical use.

## Derivation of the term “ableism” ...

- Civil rights, disability movements (1960s & 1970s), feminist movement (1980s)

The term "ableism" was coined by US feminists in the 1980s

- Used in a public document by the Council of the London Borough of Haringey in a 1986 press release

# World according to ableism

- Persons with disabilities need cure and care ... all the time
- Persons with disabilities are less productive
- Persons with disabilities are of less value, less of a human being with individuality
- Not an equal member of society

# World according to ableism

- Intentionally exclude persons with disabilities from society
- Forced sterilization
- Institutionalization
- Denial of legal capacity
- Biotechnologies based on eugenics
- More policy attention and budget to cure and care.
- Laws and policies do not invest in unfolding potentials of persons with disabilities, and rather discriminatory
- Segregated education, employment, living arrangement.
- Treat persons with disabilities more like a child
- More cultural portrayal of persons with disabilities as an object of pity
- When persons with disabilities achieve something, it becomes overly “inspirational”
- A whole society’s infrastructure and information are inaccessible → becomes afterthoughts

Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities  
A/HRC/43/41 and other resources

# World according to ableism

--→ Unconscious bias and micro-aggression can happen

- “You do not look ‘disabled’”
- “You do not expect to have a family, do you?”
- “ Oh, you are disabled,” “but you are beautiful!” Intended as a compliment ...?
  
- “ You do not have to pursue that much high education”
  
- “You are always so inspiring!”

--→ When “ableism” is internalized by persons with disabilities, their internal voices might be

- I am not good enough
- When being helped by somebody: “ I am so sorry to trouble you”
- I have to prove myself to the world that I can do things, not be looked down upon by others
- Perhaps I should not raise my voice here, as nobody might recognize me

# No “ableism,” if diversity exists?



- The answer is “no”
- Even when there are many different people with different backgrounds, and they look “diverse,” “ableism” could still exist in people’s minds, behaviours & in their decisions on policies, programmes & resource allocations



# No “ableism,” if inclusion exists?



- The answer is “yes”
- Inclusion should respect equality and individual dignity



# THANK YOU

## Follow us



[www.unescap.org](http://www.unescap.org)



[unescap](https://www.facebook.com/unescap)



[unitednationsescap](https://twitter.com/unitednationsescap)



[united-nations-escap](https://www.linkedin.com/company/united-nations-escap)



[unescap](https://www.twitter.com/unescap)



[unescap](https://www.youtube.com/unescap)