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**ILO Global Business and Disability Network**

**Singapore meeting**

**Host: Enabling Employers Network**

**Venue: Holiday Inn Singapore Orchard City**

**Room: Crystal Suite, Level 2**

**Friday, 11 January 2013**

# Background information and programme

Holiday Inn hosted the sixth meeting of the ILO Global Business and Disability Network in Singapore, Asia on Friday, 11 January 2013.

Prior to the meeting, on Thursday 10 January, two optional site visits were organised for the participants to learn about training and hiring of persons with disabilities of two different employers. Both employers are part of the Enabling Employers Network’s (EEN) Centre for Training and Integration (CTI) programme for disabled persons. The EEN works in collaboration with public and private sectors, and the CTIs provide industry specific skills training in the companies’ real work environments.

1. Holiday Inn Singapore Orchard City

Representatives of Holiday Inn Singapore Orchard City presented their training programme for persons with disabilities. The participants toured all units of the training programme: the customer service center that takes all external and internal calls of the hotel; the housekeeping unit; and the kitchen. The participants also had the chance to discuss with the supervisors of the trainees, as well as the trainees of the CTI programme.

1. Eureka Call Centre Systems

The second Center for Training and Integration site visit was to Eureka Call Centre Systems where Mr. Alvin Nathan shared information about the work and values of his enterprise. He also presented the way his company developed business processes and workplace environment for improved accommodation for persons with disabilities. He emphasized that by creating a more inclusive and positive work environment for persons with disabilities, the enterprise has more motivated employees, who also perform as efficiently as nondisabled call center employees. The trainees and employees with disabilities perform beyond the expected key performance indicators. The participants and the Eureka Call Centre trainees and employees were also given a chance to meet with each other and discuss the Centre and its work.

The one full day Network meeting on 11 January consisted of an agenda including welcoming remarks by the host EEN, the ILO and Disabled People’s Association (DPA), followed by presentations by the ILO and eight companies, as well as three resource groups. Also, five separate roundtable discussions were conducted, followed by reports on the roundtable findings, and closing comments by the ILO and EEN.

*For agenda, please see Annex 1.*

# Handouts and materials

Prior to the meeting, the organizers sent out the following handouts to the participants: official invitation letter, agenda, registration form, information on venue, and the meeting flyer.

At the meeting, the ILO distributed the following materials in electronic format (soft copy) on a USB stick with the following folders including information and publications on the different topics.

1. Meeting material on the Network meeting in Singapore
2. Getting to know the Network (Info package on the ILO Global Business and Disability Network)
3. Network Annual Report 2011
4. Network Newsletters
5. Network Publications (in English, Chinese, French and Spanish)
   1. Disability in the Workplace: Company Practices (ILO, 2010)
   2. Disability in the Workplace: Employers’ Organizations and Business Networks (ILO, 2011)
6. International Instruments
   1. UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)
   2. ILO Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) Convention, 1983, (No. 159) and Recommendation (No. 168), 1983
   3. ILO Code of Practice on Managing disability in the workplace (ILO, 2002)
   4. Tripartite Declaration on multinational enterprises and social policy (ILO, 2006)
7. Enabling Employers Network Singapore
   * Enabling Employers Network’s Award Book

**Note**:

* + **Presentations** delivered during the meeting can also be downloaded from the following link: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/zlme5obz1b0eje7/-XqsYcX5N8?n=64866847>
  + **Photos** from the event, shared by SNEF: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/ggdf11jklovkbjt/oqs2KbAzEB>

# Participants

In total, the Network meeting was attended by 69 participants, including 24 participants from the ILO Global Business and Disability Network (24 attendees from 17 multinational enterprises (MNEs), 1 Employers’ Association and 6 disabled people’s organisations), 36 participants from the EEN (including representatives from employers, the Government and non-governmental organizations), four organizers from Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF) and five from the ILO.

*For a complete list of participants, please see Annex 2.*

# Welcome and introductions

## 4.1 Opening speeches

*Mr. Shantha de Silva, Chairman, Enabling Employers Network (EEN)*

* On behalf of the EEN, Mr. de Silva, Director of Operations Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines at InterContinental Hotels Group, welcomed the participants to the meeting. As Singapore has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) on 30 November 2012, he expressed that the Network meeting in Singapore was very timely.
* Moreover, Mr. Silva introduced the EEN that was established in 2007 as an initiative of the Enabling Master Plan of Singapore to promote hiring of persons with disabilities. The EEN currently has more than 230 employers committed to create jobs for persons with disabilities through the Government supported Open Door Fund. This fund provides a comprehensive package of incentives to support companies to implement job re-design, workplace modification, integration and apprenticeship programmes for people with disabilities. So far, more than 650 disabled persons have found work through the Fund.
* In his presentation, he stressed the importance for companies to provide meaningful careers for persons with disabilities. More and more employers have not only started to hire persons with disabilities, but also to recognize that persons with disabilities are productive employees. Currently, the EEN has two CTIs; the Holiday Inn Singapore Orchard Centre focusing on training different areas of the hospitality sector, and Eureka Call Centre training persons with disabilities for the call centre industry. The key strategy of the EEN is to, through its members, create a more inclusive society by promoting employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, share good practices, engage employers in hiring persons with disabilities (through amongst others the Open Door funds), and focus on creating sustainable jobs for persons with disabilities.

*Ms. Deborah France-Massin, Director, Bureau for Employers’ Activities, ILO*

* On behalf of the ILO, Ms. France-Massin welcomed the participants and thanked Singapore National Employment Federation (SNEF) for helping to organize the Network meeting in Singapore. This followed by a short introduction on the ILO as a tripartite organization that aims to achieve social justice in the workplace, and sets international labour standards.
* Furthermore, Ms. France-Massin explained that the Bureau for Employers’ Activities (ACT/EMP) liaises with the business community through employers’ organizations, with an objective to make them more representative and independent. The goal is also to bring the ILO closer to business and bring business closer to the ILO - for increased job creation, and private sector development. ACT/EMP works towards creating more awareness and engaging with companies for more inclusive workplaces.
* She also explained that the Network was founded to complement and support the work of national employment organizations that work with enterprises in their respective countries. More than 40 companies, and 18 employers organizations have signed up for the Network so far.

*Mr. Nicholas Aw, President, Disabled People’s Association (DPA)*

* Mr. Aw gave the welcoming remarks on behalf of the disabled people’s organisations (DPOs) in Singapore. DPA advocates for more independent lives for persons with disabilities, and Mr. Awe also stressed that open employment opportunities for persons with disabilities are crucial to reach this objective.
* Furthermore, Mr. Aw raised the importance of Singapore’s ratification of the UNCRPD – a step towards a more inclusive society. The implementation of UNCRPD and its Article 27 sets the right of persons with disabilities to work and employment, and he reminded that the governments alone cannot ensure this right. He therefore considered the ILO’s Global Business and Disability Network, and the EEN as highly important entities in promoting employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, highlighting that persons with disabilities are capable of a wide range of jobs, and have also proven to be more hard working and loyal when the working environment is supportive and accommodated for persons with disabilities. He stated that often persons with disabilities are only given certain types of jobs, although their skills can be much broader.
* Mr. Aw also emphasized the importance of DPOs playing a role in supporting employers in hiring persons with disabilities. Furthermore, he underlined that hiring persons with disabilities should not be for goodwill.

## 4.2 Brief introduction from participants

All participants of the meeting briefly introduced themselves by offering their name and the company/organization they represented.

## 4.3. Introduction to disability at the ILO and the ILO Global Business and Disability Network

*Ms. Debra Perry, Senior Specialist in Disability Inclusion, ILO*

* Ms. Perry set the stage for the discussions of the meeting by describing why companies hire persons with disabilities, and the business cases for hiring persons with disabilities. She gave examples on what businesses are doing in order to hire persons with disabilities, and what the ILO is doing in supporting employers in promoting disability inclusion in the workplace. Current research shows that 15 per cent of the world’s population is composed of people of disabilities. For businesses this is a significant group of people as employees and customers.
* Ms. Perry presented the focus areas of the Network, namely the business cases and human rights cases for hiring people with disabilities. Specifically on the Network, Ms. Perry mentioned that it looks at disability from a global perspective, working with the multinational companies and employers’ organizations. She emphasized the benefits of joining the Network being, amongst others, the sharing of business cases, and facilitating business to business linkages.
* Moreover, Ms. Perry reminded the participants that many disabilities are invisible (e.g. depression), and that companies often have persons with disabilities on staff, but may not be aware of it. In discussing the various dimensions of disability, she cautioned against a tendency to generalize about people with disabilities and to suggest stereotypical jobs for people with disabilities. She emphasized that gender makes a huge difference – women and girls with disabilities face dual barriers. She also noted that disabled people are often excluded from services, e.g. training opportunities and education, and thus have lower wages, and are more likely to be poor.
* Ms. Perry shared some of her experiences working with companies, and emphasized five reasons why companies employ persons with disabilities:

1. They have to – there is a legal or policy basis within the country or company, such as a quota system or anti-discrimination laws; thus, the countries and employers should adapt their jobs to persons with disabilities;
2. They were asked to – by a specialized job placement agency or the application, or retention of a disabled person;
3. They should – because of codes of practices, other corporate framework agreements, corporate social responsibility (CSR) – being good corporate citizen makes a difference. Participants were also given an example from Hong Kong where Marriot Hong Kong linked to Hong Chi Association to give job training for persons with disabilities to work at Marriott Hotel;
4. The business case –according to many studies and data Persons with disabilities often have better attendance rates, safety records and job retention rates. May companies also point out that hirding disabled persons can increase teamwork and morale.;
5. They are encouraged by governments (by e.g. tax incentive programmes for companies), peers, trade unions and employers’ organizations and coalitions and groups such as in the EEN and the ILO Global Business and Disability Network.

* To illustrate the business case on hiring people with disabilities, a short video of an American company, Walgreens and its distribution center was shown to the participants. The video illustrated the positive impact of a company hiring persons with disabilities in North America. The video can be seen at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zT2j6pRm7bM&list=PL73A22D93B709417B&index=6&feature=plpp_video>
* As part of the business case, Ms. Perry also noted a survey indicating that customers view a company positively if they hire persons with disabilities. Many customers even indicated that they would also change brands for a cause, such as disability inclusion in the workplace. Further, she noted that people with disabilities and their families and friends are customers as well.
* Regardless of the entry point for hiring disabled persons, it is important that employers come to realize the business case and value of a diverse workforce to sustain the hiring, inclusion and retention of disabled workers.
* To conclude, Ms. Perry summarized the role of the ILO in working on disability issues. As a standard setting organization, with its Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled persons) Convention (No. 159), 1983, as well as the ILO Code of Practice on managing disability in the workplace, the ILO promotes equal treatment and equal opportunity. Furthermore, the UNCRPD’s relevance to the employers – Article 27 (right to work and employment) – suggests that many countries that have ratified the Convention may need to change their laws to be in line with the UNCRPD, especially on non-discrimination and reasonable accommodation issues.

1. **Company Presentations**

## Part 1, Moderator: Mr Henrik Moller, Senior Advisor, Bureau for Employers’ Activities, ILO

5.1. Holiday Inn

*Mr. Jagdeep Thakral, General Manager*

* Mr. Thakral introduced the Holiday Inn Singapore, and highlighted that their first employee with disabilities, who still works for them, was recruited in 1986. This employee was initially recruited to work as linen runner and currently works as the doorman, and is one of the most popular and appreciated employees.
* In 2010, Holiday Inn Singapore Orchard City Centre became part of the EEN’s CTI programme, with the objectives of imparting skills and knowledge, enhancing job readiness and employment, and promoting social integration. Currently, the training areas include room cleaning, and public area cleaning. As part of the CTI programme, a ‘buddy system’ was created to motivate and support their trainees with disabilities. The hotel has projected to have 60 graduates of this trainee programme by July 2014. Currently, 13 per cent of their total number of employees are persons with disabilities.
* In conclusion Mr. Thakral shared the company’s reasons for hiring persons with disabilities. He especially mentioned the reliability of their employees with disabilities in delivering results and being valuable employees. He emphasized that when recruiting persons with disabilities, it is not about disability, but about the company receiving multiple benefits by hiring persons with disabilities.

5.2. IBM

*Ms. Tracey Ho, Workforce Diversity Leader, Asia Pacific Region*

* Ms. Ho provided an overview of IBM’s diversity programme, with disability inclusion being one of their main focuses of attention. She underscored their business case by sharing testimonies and examples of IBM employees with disabilities, and their inclusive environment.
* IBM has developed global guidelines on barrier free design (easily accessible toilets, ramps etc.), automatic accessibility upgrades, case by case location reviews for new employees and changes of work locations/stations of persons with disabilities when needed.
* Moreover, IBM has special internship programmes for persons with disabilities – with a focus to bring students with disabilities closer to the company, and to get employees of IBM to work better with persons with disabilities. The programme also includes a mentoring programme for students with disabilities in the United States and Asia. Ms. Ho also added that IBM supports business resource groups around the world for employees with disabilities to support each other. In the Asia Pacific region, IBM is currently also developing a programme on raising awareness on diversity issues.

5.3. Telenor

*Ms. Ingrid Ihme, Head of Telenor Open Mind*

* Ms. Ihme shared her experiences in disability issues. Prior to joining Telenor, she worked with the Government of Norway. For the last 16 years she has been responsible for developing and managing the Telenor Open Mind programme that promotes employment opportunity for persons with disabilities. In addition, it focuses on accessibility issues, and raises awareness of disability and inclusion.
* Ms. Ihme further presented Telenor’s Open Mind programme that has activities in 11 different markets, including several countries in Asia (Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Thailand and Malaysia). The Open Mind programme is a training programme for persons with disabilities, where the recruitment process for the traineeship is followed by competence development: the period of competence and development is two months, followed by a trainee period of ten months. At the end of the programme, around 75 per cent of the participants find regular work and permanent employment. So far, around 180 participants have participated in the programme.
* She further stated that the Open Mind programme is a win-win-win situation for employers, persons with disabilities and society as a whole. The programme was founded as the company aimed to be the ‘first mover’ in disability issues among employers in Norway. Another important reason was that the company wanted qualified employees with disabilities, which could be attained through their own training programme. The programme is also crucial for their corporate responsibility initiatives around the world.

5.4. Standard Chartered

*Mr. Aalishaan Zaidi, Group Head of Branch Banking*

* Mr. Aalishaan started his presentation by giving a short introduction to Standard Chartered, and stated that diversity and inclusion are their strategic focus areas globally, disability inclusion being an important part of it. Not only is Standard Chartered focusing on hiring persons with disabilities, but they also need to reflect on developing their services for their disabled customers. He stressed that the culture change within the bank has been drastic during the last years concerning diversity and inclusion, and this can be witnessed in even the smallest markets (e.g. Sri Lanka, Ghana, Uganda, Qatar) having programmes on hiring persons with disabilities.
* Employees with disabilities at the Standard Chartered have shown strong loyalty and solid business results. For example, in Pakistan telesales that was formed in 2007 has a team of close to 30 people with disabilities and up to today there have been no customer complaints about the team. Furthermore, the visually impaired teleteam in Indonesia is one of the most committed and reliable teams with positive attitude in their work environment.
* Mr. Aalishaan stressed the responsibility of companies to make small adjustments in their workplaces. Standard Chartered relies extensively on NGOs to better understand how to implement reasonable accommodation in their workplaces. He further stated that persons with disabilities are needed in the workforce for improved service for especially customers with disabilities, and for more inclusive and diverse environments in general. Also, as demographics of the world is fast changing with increasing ageing population around the world, issues in relation to disability are to be increasingly considered by companies to offer better service to their customers.
* Mr. Aalishaan concluded his presentation by stating that companies can make a real difference in promoting disability rights by hiring people with disabilities, rather than only collaborating with schools or other institutions for philanthropic purposes.

The questions and discussion points below followed the presentations.

1. A participant asked the presenters about lessons learned in hiring processes of persons with disabilities. Another participant asked whether companies had specific programmes to support persons with disabilities in their respective workplaces.

* The Holiday Inn representative answered that they have different initiatives to support work on disability inclusion in their organization. For example, they engage with the government programmes in conducting surveys of hidden disabilities or other relevant initiatives promoting disability inclusion.
* Standard Chartered representative mentioned that ownership by the management with regards to promoting disability inclusion at the workplace has to be in place, and that changing people’s mindsets concerning disability is the most challenging aspect in his experience.
* IBM has experienced challenges in getting business leaders to consider persons with disabilities as candidates for recruitment positions, and to hire persons with disabilities. To find a candidate with excepted qualifications was felt to be difficult due to the lack of education of persons with disabilities. Therefore, IBM currently also collaborates with universities. Moreover, companies have also expressed challenges in managing people with disabilities due to the fear and lack of specific management skills.

1. Another participant asked about the differences in legislation in different countries; for example, understanding ‘equality’ and the different sets of existing frameworks on disability equality (e.g. the Equality Act of 2010 in the UK vs. others). The participant further asked what the barriers of working with people with disabilities in different countries are, and how the barriers can be overcome.

* The IBM representative replied that in countries where there are quotas with sanctions involved, it is easier to require human resources/hiring managers to employ persons with disabilities. To respond to the second question, she replied that it might be difficult for the employer to obtain the actual number of employees with disabilities, especially as companies are not allowed to track that information in the database. For example, in Europe privacy laws restrict the companies to track information on a person’s disability. In China, on the other hand, employers are requested to report the numbers of employees with disabilities to the Government, so this shows the different requirements in different countries. When hiring a person with disability, IBM asks if the person wants to self-disclose information about his or her disability in order for him/her to be able to participate in specific supports programmes developed for their disabled employees.
* The representative of Standard Chartered replied that making the working experience and the job role meaningful for each employee, including persons with disabilities, is the key to reducing barriers. Diversity is a strength for a company and it helps to pave the way to show the best practices leading to cultural change. However, problems and issues are quite unique in each part of the world, e.g. Africa is still struggling with HIV/AIDS and single parents, as well as various kinds of health issues. Therefore, the key is to know the working environment and society of the respective country.
* IBM followed by stating that key to successful recruitment of persons with disabilities is to not consider it charity. Furthermore, if the working environment is inclusive, the employee can perform and become an asset. However, in the long run, to provide better job opportunities for persons with disabilities, companies need to go beyond the hiring process, and engage in earlier stages of the career path – in education and training of persons with disabilities.
* Telenor also agreed on job matching being very important. As companies have daily performance expectations from each employee, matching skills with requirements of the position, as well as having local ownership are crucial in managing disability programmes. Therefore, it was recommended that companies should partner with local NGOs or DPOs to develop their disability programmes.
* The Accenture representative reflected on how data privacy issues in relation to identifying employees with disabilities should be tackled in the workplace, and how the companies - if employees with disabilities themselves would not want to be identified - could be supported to accommodate their employees with disabilities in their work places.

1. A representative of the EEN posed a question related to self-esteem of persons with disabilities, and how companies could let employees with disabilities know that they are useful and contributing to the company.

* Ms. Perry responded by sharing her experiences globally that companies often cannot find enough skilled and qualified employees with disabilities for many jobs. However, she stressed that some companies conduct specific trainings for prospective employees so that they have qualified candidates. She mentioned that IBM worked together with some governments that have quota laws, to provide scholarships to disabled students so that qualified workers would be available for them to hire. She noted another good practice example that the ILO has implemented, based on an IBM practice - establishing a *centralized reasonable accommodation fund* in-house. A centralized fund means that no individual manager has to take costs related to reasonable accommodation at of his or her budget, which could be a disincentive to hiring.

*Part 2,* *Moderator: Deborah France-Massin, Director, Bureau for Employers’ Activities, ILO*

5.5. CEVA Logistics

*Ms. Peggy Ng, General Manager, Human Resources and Administration*

* Ms. Ng delivered a presentation on their diversity management globally, and the company’s disability programme ‘Pearl Project’ that is committed to promote equal opportunities for persons with disabilities. The programme focuses on hiring persons with different kinds of disabilities and since its start there has been an increase in hiring persons with disabilities.
* CEVA Logistics has developed a toolkit to guide their managers to understand disability management in their company, and to build partnerships with civil society organizations to assist in workplace integration of persons with disabilities. For example, in Singapore they work closely with BizLink, a local NGO that is involved in training and job placement of disabled persons. Ms. Ng further shared testimonies of employees with disabilities, and solutions for reasonable accommodation in their company. Furthermore, she shared information about the special support given for employees with disabilities – for example, different ways of communication are taken into account for safety procedures.

5.6. Novartis

*Ms. Richelle Hogan, Country Head of Human Resources*

* Ms. Hogan introduced Novartis in Singapore and globally. Although disability and inclusion are new to Novartis, Singapore, within the company diversity is a strong value. She emphasized that all Novartis staff need to value the company principles of inclusive working environment, and understand the added value of embracing diversity.
* In order to provide better accessibility for persons with disabilities in their offices and buildings, Novartis has made progress in supporting, sharing experiences, and collaborating with their offices around the world to design more inclusive work places.
* For their customers with visual impairments, Novartis has ensured that all of their medicine packages are also in Braille. Currently, Novartis is also looking into occupational safety and health issues (fire drills etc.) to better accommodate persons with disabilities.

*The moderator, in conclusion, commented that the participants in the meeting room are all convinced by the business cases and the advantages of hiring persons with disabilities, but wondered how the line managers could be persuaded to think the same way?*

5.7. Genashtim Innovative Learning

*Mr. Thomas Ng, Executive Director*

* Mr. Ng briefly presented his Singaporean registered company, with 60 staff in six countries, of which 60 per cent are disabled. The company provides online learning and support services, and one of their services is managed 100 per cent by persons with disabilities. To highlight the diversity of persons with disabilities in their organizational chart, he highlighted that their employees with disabilities are scattered horizontally and vertically in the organization, and half of the top management are persons with disabilities.
* Mr. Ng noted that in many developing countries, mobility and accessibility issues are key barriers for persons with disabilities to get a job. However, with enabling technologies and restructuring work processes to compliment abilities, the ‘working-from-home’ model can be provided for persons with disabilities as an alternative.
* Furthermore, Mr. Ng stated that their employees with disabilities are expected to reach the same productivity levels as the rest of the employees, and all employees receive equal pay for equal work. From his experience he knows that persons with disabilities are determined and motivated employees, and contribute to the stability and sustainability of the company.

5.8. KPMG

*Mr. Stephen Tjoa, Partner, Human Resources*

* Mr. Tjoa reminded the participants that human resources professionals can play an important role in influencing the work environment and regulations in promoting disability inclusion, and make a difference by hiring persons with disabilities. In KPMG Singapore two out of ten units are led by persons with disabilities, and ten per cent of the employees in top leadership positions experience some forms of disability.
* Mr. Tjoa was proud to share a story of one of their employees who was recruited in 2008 – he applied to different organizations with great academic scores, but did not succeed in getting a job anywhere. He was then recruited by KPMG based on his excellent skills and study records. KPMG was not prepared to provide him with an accessible workplace, but they decided to recruit him in any case. Prior to him starting to work, KPMG identified his transportation route from home to the workplace together with him. Negotiations were also held with his father during this process. The company also restructured the office to provide better accessibility and to accommodate him. Six months after the recruitment, he started to work in the office that had been transformed into a more accessible working environment for him. He started working in the audit department an accountant, then became a tax specialist, and is currently a knowledge management specialist working partly from home.
* In conclusion, Mr. Tjoa underlined that when hiring persons with disabilities, it is about attitude, and about embracing diversity.

*The moderator commented on that it all often starts with one person as an example or case for the company to start their work on disability management.*

The questions and discussion points below followed the presentations.

1. A participant commented that employing persons with disabilities makes business sense, although persons with disabilities need guidance and training for the job in the beginning. However, persons with disabilities need to be given the chance initially.

* Novartis replied that it is a common business practice to recruit individuals (disabled and non-disabled) who need further training to meet the job requirements. For example, the best sales representative might not come from a background one might think is the best suited for the job. Therefore, if a company can address the hiring needs a bit differently, the rest should be trainable, with compromise and commitment.
* Genashtim Innovative Learning representative answered that the only qualification they have for their positions is determination, i.e. anybody who is willing to sit in front of the computer is qualified.
* Ms. Perry further commented that employing a person with disability might increase the overall productivity of the company. For example, some manufacturing companies can increase their productivity by changing processes and design of their existing working methods. She further shared the example of Eureka Call Centre; by making the workplace more accessible, safer and better, not only employees with disabilities benefit, but all staff members. Therefore, there can be exceptional change in corporate culture and productivity when a company hires disabled persons.
* KPMG representative gave a further example of the employee mentioned in his company presentation: the financial services team led by this employee with disabilities became much more efficient as a result of better planning of working processes, and the best check lists for financial services designed for physically disabled. These check lists consequently improved the overall performance for all financial services teams, and these check lists have since then become a real value added for the company’s financial services.

1. **Resource Group Presentations**

*Moderator: Ms Debra Perry, Senior Specialist in Disability Inclusion, Skills and Employability Department, ILO*

Ms. Perry’s introductory note to the resource group presentation highlighted that nobody does this job alone, and that this is reason why the ILO founded the ILO Global Business and Disability Network. She highlighted the resources available in different countries to create more inclusive environments for companies.

6.1. Enabling Employers Network

*Mr. Alvin Foo, Senior Associate Consultant of Bain & Company*

* Mr. Foo gave a quick overview of his employer Bain & Company, a management consulting company that has collaborated with the EEN to launch a survey on companies in Singapore promoting disability in their workplaces, and on hiring persons with disabilities. The survey was conducted among more than 100 employers in Singapore, including both companies with and without disabled employees. The key results of the survey showed that employing persons with disabilities is a growing trend that can be sustained by increasing awareness of persons with disabilities in employment initiatives; finding persons with relevant skills and experiences remains a major challenge, and focusing on ‘soft’ factors, such as company culture and work ethics in relation to an inclusive working environment, is crucial. He further stated that around half of the employers have started employing persons with disabilities only in the last few years.
* The survey further indicated that the reasons employers gave for not employing persons with disabilities were: 1) insufficient knowledge in disability issues and recruiting persons with disabilities; 2) insufficient funds to cover costs to accommodate persons with disabilities in the workplace; 3) the amount of extra paper work to receive the government support. However, the survey also showed that despite the available funding, companies do not always tap into these funding opportunities.
* Mr. Foo also gave a brief presentation on the EEN that seeks to champion and advance employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. The EEN also recognises employers that hire persons with disabilities by giving the Enabling Employers awards. The CTI programme is one of the main initiatives of the EEN.
* He further explained about the Open Door Fund of the Government of Singapore that promotes hiring persons with disabilities. The fund focuses on supporting employers in hiring persons with disabilities in Singapore. Moreover, the Ministry of Education and SNEF collaborate on a ‘work experience’ programme (for internships). He also mentioned that not many employers are aware of the existing initiatives to support the employers.

6.2. Disabled Persons International Asia Pacific (DPI/AP)

*Ms. Saowalak Thongkuay, Regional Development Officer*

* Ms. Saowalak briefly presented the DPI/AP, and reflected on how the organisation could become a resource to employers, and how DPI/AP could assist and support companies in promoting disability inclusion. She further introduced the Comparative Study on ASEAN labour laws and practices (on non-discrimination legislation, quota laws etc.) that was conducted in collaboration between the ASEAN governments and DPI/AP. She also reminded that in 2015 ASEAN will become one community, and many challenges are still to be overcome.
* She further mentioned the importance of sharing best practices and reports, and various technical support material and initiatives produced by different organisations and institutions. She also emphasized the importance of training employers in how to manage persons with disabilities in the workplace, and to improve communication between employers and persons with disabilities. For DPOs and persons with disabilities, she believed it was important to conduct specific trainings, as well as simulation exercises of interviews and different situations in work places. She concluded by informing that more information on the work on disability in Asia Pacific could be found on their website [www.dpiap.org](http://www.dpiap.org).

*The moderator commented that partnering with DPOs and NGOs is a way to address some of the challenges that companies are facing in employing persons with disabilities.*

6.3. National Council of Social Service (NCSS)

*Ms. Gillian Goh, Senior Executive, Adult Disability Service Department*

* Ms. Goh started her presentation by giving an insight into programmes of the Government of Singapore in supporting equal employment for persons with disabilities. The ratification of the UNCRPD underscores Singapore’s commitment to enhance lives of persons with disabilities. Furthermore, the Enabling Masterplan 2012-2016 is addressing the needs of persons with disabilities and their caregivers.
* Ms. Goh also reiterated that reasonable accommodation can be very simple and not too costly. She further explained some other government initiatives: the Special Employment Credit (SEC) for employers, which is designed for employees with disabilities not earning more than a certain amount a month, and the Open Door Fund, especially for apprenticeship programmes and workshops on diversity management.

The questions and discussion points below followed the presentations:

1. A participant asked for a preferred, sustainable model to enable persons with disabilities to get long-term employment or return to work after e.g. an accident.

* Ms. Perry replied by emphasizing that best practices vary from country to country – employers need to take the local context into consideration in addressing issues of governance and culture. Although the quota system is different from country to country (eg. Thailand has a quota law of 1 per cent, whereas in Vietnam the percentage is 3.5), she stressed that one needs to pay attention to the enforcement of the law. For successful results, DPOs and the government need to be working together. In conclusion, there is no one single standard for addressing challenges in employing persons with disabilities.

1. Another participant mentioned that a key barrier for persons with disabilities to get a job is derived from poor accessibility to public transportation. Therefore, the participant asked what kind of transportation could be provided for free for persons with disabilities. It was also noted by another participant that some persons with disabilities have given up their jobs due to social challenges (e.g. families not being supportive), emphasizing the need for counseling support for persons with disabilities and their families.

* Ms. Saowalak replied that the Governments need to address issues around accessibility, and that companies can also support in providing accessible taxis for persons with disabilities: in some countries taxi transportation would be subsidized by the Government; and in Vietnam some companies provide dormitories for employees with disabilities.
* Another participant commented that wage subsidies are good, but unless government provides with additional services, such subsidies are not sustainable. Long-term employment with subsidized transportation, in addition to wage subsidies – or someone who supports the family – would better address the challenge.
* NCSS stated that it has consulted with persons with disabilities in focus group discussions before the Enabling Masterplan was designed. The Government realizes that the inaccessible public transportation still is a key challenge in Singapore. She reminded that family service centers are supporting persons with disabilities and their families, and in terms of time-bound incentives, the Open Door Funds supports with the initial costs that a company faces in accommodating persons with disabilities.

1. The third comment from the audience also focused on possible solutions to the discussion on transportation issues – and which institution would be responsible for paying the expenses.

* Ms. Perry responded that all future public transportation needs to be accessible, and that some creative examples have been seen already, such as cooperatives providing accessible transportation. She further mentioned that from experiences, in terms of social support and costs of hiring persons with disabilities, most of persons with disabilities do not need to be provided with accommodation by the employer. In fact, most times there are no costs involved in hiring persons with disabilities. Nevertheless, social support is often needed for persons with disabilities and therefore it is important to create supports systems, and offer possibilities to consult with job coaches. Moreover, from an ILO perspective, the policies are to be guided by the ILO Convention No. 159, its Recommendation, the UNCRPD, as well as the ILO Code of Practice on Managing Disability in the Workplace. In conclusion, Ms. Perry reminded that we need to respect national cultures, and allow special measures, such as affirmative action and quotas.

1. **Roundtable discussions**

*Chairs: Ms Debra Perry, Senior Specialist in Disability Inclusion, Skills and Employability Dept., ILO*

*Mr Henrik Moller, Senior Advisor, Bureau for Employers’ Activities, ILO*

Working group discussions:

The Participants were divided into five groups to discuss issues around managing persons with disabilities at a workplace. Participants voluntarily joined a group that addressed an area of their interest. The ILO distributed a guideline containing a few questions on each topic to facilitate the discussion (See Annex 3). Afterwards, each group reported its findings and other participants had the opportunity to provide further comments or ask questions.

7.1. Group 1: Hiring people with disabilities

Group 1 discussed the main challenges faced when hiring people with disabilities, and reported back on the following challenges:

* Job matching: companies cannot find people with disabilities who are equipped with required skills, and databases are not available for this purpose. *Recommendation*: Employers’ associations need to be more active in providing services and data, and use creativity to sponsor internship to train persons with disabilities and thus be part of the solution (e.g. L’Oréal offers special internships to introduce the company to students with disabilities)
* Transportation to and from the workplace is a challenge for persons with disabilities. *Recommendation*: company could offer transportation by organizing collective transportation from a meeting point that is easy to get to, and the employer could also provide with accessible accommodation.
* Families, especially in South East Asia, are very protective of their family members with disabilities, possibly limiting the opportunities and possibilities of a person with disability to get a job. *Recommendation*: In collaboration with Parents’ Associations for persons with disabilities, the companies can create parental groups to support parents.
* Creation of communities for persons with disabilities to share experiences and find work opportunities.

7.2. Group 2: People with disabilities and their access to employment

Group 2 discussed the major obstacles faced by persons with disabilities in finding employment, and summarized the main barriers to be the following:

* Lack of access to information for persons with disabilities: most persons with disabilities do not know where to find information on jobs, and many times the person cannot understand the information given or obtained. Guidance should be provided to persons with disabilities to be aware of the available support and assistance.
* Lack of transportation, not only for persons with physical disabilities, but all kinds of disabilities.
* Lack of interview opportunities for persons with disabilities; mindsets of employers still need to be transformed. *Recommendation*: to train persons with disabilities to showcase their skills in their job applications.
* Understanding the nature of the job by persons with disabilities, and lack of acceptance of the employee with disabilities from the social environment (staff members etc.)

7.3. Group 3: Dealing with the legislative environment concerning people with disabilities

Group 3 was asked to reflect on the voluntary targets or mandatory quota related to persons with disabilities and how they play into company’s hiring strategy, and whether they are effective in practice. The Group reported on the pros and the cons in meeting the targets:

* Mandatory quotas are useful as incentives to promote employment for persons with disabilities, provided that there are fines attached to the quota. However, quotas might discourage employers from developing their own disability programmes. Consequently, the companies might not realize the benefits of employing persons with disabilities, but only see hiring employees with disabilities as a burden.
* Voluntary targets ensure keeping track of internal performance, provided that it is being part of an organizational policy. This could lead to increased ownership in recruiting persons with disabilities. However, it needs to be done at all levels and disciplines. The drawback of voluntary targets could be that companies would only employ certain persons with disabilities in certain areas and with certain levels of skills, rather than throughout the organization.
* In conclusion, according to the group, voluntary targets are preferable, and it would be effective as long as it is conducted in a holistic manner, and understood and implemented at all levels of the company.

7.4. Group 4: Linking with other partners

Group 4 discussed ways in which each participant’s organization can contribute to the overall work of the Network:

* Resources
* Employers, governments and civil society organizations can provide with skills trainings by creating resource groups that provide different kinds of trainings, such as soft skills trainings, and leadership trainings to manage persons with disabilities.
* Accessible transportation: create a platform where tripartite groups can discuss on solutions for accessible transportation for persons with disabilities
* Collaboration and initiatives
* Create a network with linkages between SNEF and employers, Voluntary Welfare Organizations and resource groups, e.g. social workers could guide persons with disabilities throughout the job search, and give them soft skills trainings
* Develop an employer start-up kit with information on resources on managing persons with disabilities in the workplace
* Support tracking statistics and data on persons with disabilities
* Harness accessible IT to support persons with disabilities in accessing information
* Advocate for tax incentives for companies that actively hire persons with disabilities

7.5. Group 5: Supporting national employers’ networks

Group 5 explored how the ILO could support the activities of the organizations (employers, resource groups), as well as the challenges faced at the national level in moving forward towards realizing the objectives. The Group reported the following:

Activities that could be supported by the ILO:

* Providing linkages to other partnering companies hiring persons with disabilities
* Providing updates on good practices and latest incentives and funding platforms
* Partnering with local transportation companies in organizing transport for persons with disabilities

Challenges faced at the national level:

* Limited skills and educational background, as well as lack of soft skills of persons with disabilities
* Weak education curriculum in special schools
* Lack of relevant training programmes for companies employing persons with disabilities
* Limited availability of counseling centers to provide support to persons with disabilities
* Lack of awareness on disability; need for raising awareness among the general public, e.g. through open house events.

To conclude the working group reporting, Ms. Perry wished to share information on some resources related to harnessing IT and accommodation:

* The ILO publication on ‘Employability – A resource guide on disability for employers in Asia and the Pacific’: <http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_bk_pb_98_en.pdf>
* Job Accommodation Network (USA): www.askjan.com
* Job Access (Australia): http://jobaccess.gov.au

1. **The way forward and Closing**

In closing the Network meeting, Ms. Perry thanked the participants and the organizers for the fruitful discussions and exchanges of experiences and challenges. She extended special thanks to SNEF for their excellent organization, and bringing all the participants together. She reminded that a meeting evaluation would be sent to all participants through Survey Monkey. She further asked that if any of the participants, being representatives of multinational companies, and not yet Network members, to be in contact with the ILO. She strongly encouraged employers to create more diverse workplaces.

Mr. Lee from SNEF also thanked the EEN for the organization and logistics of the Network meeting. He encouraged all participants and partners to continue contributing to better working environments and employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.