

Speech: Secretary of State speech at the 'Solutions to Disability Inclusion' event

I am delighted to be here to mark International Day for Persons with Disabilities in advance of this Sunday.

I want to start by saying a huge thank you to Microsoft for hosting us today and also a big thank to you to BOND Disability and Development group for arranging this event.

Thank you Microsoft for your leadership as well and the example that you are setting.

You recognise that employing people with disabilities is not just the right thing to do, but the smart thing to do.

You recognise the virtuous circle that comes from employing people with disabilities.

The insight they bring to your workforce. Their ideas and entrepreneurial skills. Their drive to raise expectations around what is possible.

And that sends a powerful message.

You are inspiring other organisations and businesses and in turn you are benefitting from the talents and gifts of so many people.

And so it is fitting that the message I have today is delivered under your roof.

I worked with Microsoft in my previous role as Minister of State for Disabled People.

And in handing over the baton to my successor the wonderful Sarah Newton who is down the end I said to the sector that they were not losing a Minister, just gaining another one because I am committed to this agenda.

We need to tackle the extra costs of disability. We need to push money into healthcare and early interventions and use the data from that to stop doing assessments on people. We need to enable people to become economically active. Just because all of that is in our in tray domestically, it doesn't mean we should ignore how we can help the rest of the world raise their game too.

One of the most memorable meetings I had in that role was with a young man who taught coding to people with autism and Tourette's.

He did this in the UK and overseas. When I met him he had just returned from

a trip to Bangladesh. He was eleven years old. Eleven.

He himself had a disability. But he was using his talents uninhibited by physical or mental obstacles.

I often think about what the world will be like when he is older. What will he be doing in the years to come?

I think about his care for others around the world, his hunger to share what he knew with them, and the power of the message he was sending to those around him.

What a force for good he was. And what a force for good he will continue to be, if given more opportunity.

Today the UK Government has launched the Health and Work roadmap, a new plan to transform disability employment over the next ten years. to get one million more disabled people, and people with long term illnesses, into work in the UK.

Its premise is simple: unless every one of our citizens can reach their full potential, our nation never will.

Whatever a person's abilities, whatever their talents, whatever their gifts, all of them have something to offer.

And it is our job to ensure that they can. To ensure that they thrive, fulfil their ambitions, make their ideas a reality and contribute to their community.

That makes complete sense, doesn't it?

It makes sense not just in the UK, but in every nation on earth.

If we are in the business of helping nations prosper, and if we want them to succeed, then people with disabilities must be central to all that we do.

They are the group most discriminated against in society.

Too often, people with disabilities are forgotten.

Too often, their needs are unfulfilled.

Too often, the opportunities they bring are not fully appreciated.

In many parts of the world, people with disabilities simply don't count.

They are neglected and isolated. They are attacked and abused. They are invisible.

Waldah, a four year-old Ugandan girl with cerebral palsy, became isolated from her family and her wider community because of her disability.

This forced her mother Lucy to hide her away. For Lucy, the strain was too

much. She became depressed and ended up losing her job.

All this because of society's refusal to accept a four year-old girl for who she is.

There are countless stories like this all over the world, and much worse.

Stories of people with disabilities who are denied the love, the support, the education, the healthcare services and the opportunities that they have a right to.

Stories of people with disabilities in developing countries fighting every day just to survive. Their resilience is as impressive as it is humbling.

It is harder, often impossible, for children with disabilities to go to school.

When they grow up, it is more difficult for them to find a way to make a living.

In many instances, they are completely cast out from the rest of society.

And in conflict zones, these problems are compounded.

There are one billion people in the world living with disabilities.

That's more than one in eight of us.

1 in 8 being excluded from the workforce.

Facing discrimination at every turn. Being unrepresented.

Being unable to build a business. Being precluded from bringing your problem solving skills, your insights, and your resilience to bear.

Imagine not having the tools to contribute to your household, your family, the world, and thrive as a human being.

For many, this is the reality. It short-changes humanity. And it must stop.

We need to break down the barriers that people with disabilities face in their everyday lives.

People with disabilities must have the opportunity to fulfil their true potential and to help their countries prosper.

As Secretary of State for International Development, this will be one of my top priorities.

As a department, we will put disability at the heart of everything that we do. We know that we all have a long way to go, but we are determined to get there.

As our commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals promises, we will

leave no one behind.

My vision is that people with disabilities are consistently included in, and benefit from, the opportunities that are available to everyone in society.

I want to see a world where people with disabilities can access a quality education, productive employment and the chances in life that they deserve.

I want to eliminate the appalling stigma and discrimination that they face.

I want to ensure that the international system delivers for people with disabilities.

And crucially, when it comes to finding solutions to these challenges, I want to ensure we learn more about what works, where, and why.

Good data is essential.

We must use the power of evidence and reason to ensure that we unearth solutions that don't just do good – but do the most good possible for every penny spent.

And there is a lot to do, but DFID has already made a good start.

UK Aid is crowdsourcing new ways to make societies more inclusive for people with disabilities.

We have supported over 40,000 girls with disabilities, helping them access an education in Kenya and Uganda.

In Bangladesh, we are providing jobs and skills for people with disabilities in the garment industry and in small businesses.

We are also helping people to start their own businesses.

Sok Khoen is a young woman in Cambodia who now owns her own grocery shop thanks to a programme run by ADD International and funded by DFID. She has been steadily growing her business ever since.

Vision for a Nation, a UK-based charity, has distributed innovative adjustable glasses for those with visual impairments in Rwanda. The glasses cost just £1 for patients, and are giving some of the world's poorest people back their sight.

D-Rev, a small business supported by UK Aid through its Amplify programme, is developing and scaling up a ground-breaking low-cost prosthetic knee for young adults in rural Africa and Asia.

Thanks to funding received through the Google Impact Challenge, Bristol-based charity Motivation is exploring how 3D printing can be used to develop and produce tailored mobility solutions for wheelchair users in the developing world.

It is exactly this kind of invention and creativity that UK Aid wants to

encourage.

That is why we will be matching pound-for-pound donations to Motivation's Ready, Willing and Able appeal, launching this Sunday.

It will help reinforce the British public's efforts to help people with disabilities live with dignity, earn a living and create lasting opportunities for themselves.

These inspiring organisations are leading the way. Now we must all match their ambition and entrepreneurial spirit.

We must also expand the circle of people working in this area, and build a wider and even more ambitious movement for change.

That's why today I am proud to announce that the UK Government will host its first ever Global Disability Summit in London this summer.

We will work with disabled people's organisations, governments, companies and charities to find creative and lasting ways to help transform the lives of all people living with disabilities around the world.

And crucially, we will work with the International Disability Alliance to ensure that people with disabilities are at the centre of this work. – from its planning and focus, right through to delivery.

At the Summit, we will need to tackle the big questions.

How can we help people with disabilities build a livelihood in the world's poorest countries?

How can we make proven solutions available as widely as they are needed?

How can we all – governments, businesses and civil society around the world –share our experiences?

How can we make use of the new opportunities that technology brings?

And how can we challenge discrimination and stigma, so that people with disabilities live with dignity, and become the leaders we need them to be?

I am asking these questions to you. All of you.

DFID wants to hear from you.

We must all share our best ideas, and put them to the test. Then we must share what we learn.

It is vital that we harness the smartest solutions from every sector – from government and business through to civil society and academia.

As well as getting the basics right for all people with disabilities – access to healthcare, livelihoods, a good education and freedom from fear and violence – I know that technology will be at the heart of many solutions that

we create.

Thanks to technology, we have opportunities that previous generations did not.

We have the power to eradicate poverty.

To enable a person to participate fully in society.

To overcome barriers.

To be connected.

To be empowered.

Technology reduces our costs, extends our reach, and helps us realise our dreams.

It will take this, and all of us, to ensure that people with disabilities are at the heart of all we do in development.

It will take ingenuity and creativity.

And it will take resolve.

At DFID, we are resolved.

I believe in the power of aid to tackle the problems we face – to end disease, hunger and extreme poverty.

And when it comes to supporting people with disabilities, I believe they must have the freedom and opportunities they need to thrive.

There is a long way to go for us all. But with the work the UK is doing, we are beginning to fulfil the promise to leave no one behind.

I now call on others to follow suit. Governments, companies and civil society must join us, and step up their commitments.

Together, we will ensure that all people with disabilities fulfil their potential.

Unless they do, humanity will not.

Thank you.