

National Platform for the Rights of the Disabled

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We are herewith releasing the copy of a letter we have addressed to Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi today. The letter is self explanatory.

Shri Narendra Modi
Prime Minister
New Delhi

Dear Prime Minister,

On December 27, 2015 during the course of your *'Mann Ki Baat'* you had referred to persons with disabilities thus: "Those in whom *Paramatma* has created a deficiency in the body, those for whom some part of the body does not work properly, we call them 'viklaang'.....*'Why don't we, in our country, replace the word 'viklaang' with the word 'divyaang'?' These are those people who possess divinity — divyata — in one or more parts of their body; whose bodies are possessed by divine power (divya shakti).....'*"

We presumed it to be a one-off remark, emerging from some stray thoughts. But in the subsequent days we were bombarded with the use of the term '*divyaang*', not by you alone but various others in the government, who have taken the cue.

Today, at the mega event for distribution of aids and appliances at Varanasi the term was used repeatedly and lapped up by a section of the media also.

Even while not questioning the motive behind the coining of this expression, it is needless to say that mere change of terminology is not going to bring about any change in the manner in which people with disabilities are treated. Invoking divinity will in no way lessen the stigma and discrimination that persons with disabilities have been historically subjected to and continue to encounter in their daily lives. Exclusion and marginalisation cannot be addressed by using patronising terms like '*divyang*'. On the contrary, they will only invoke sympathy and underline that charity is what counts.

Persons with disabilities, overcoming various odds and multiple hurdles have proven their mettle. It would be fallacious however to conclude that this is due to any divine attribute. Such invocations would only tend to create myths, even while squarely failing to address the issues that the disabled face.

Dignity, accommodation and recognition of their rights as equal and productive citizens are what persons with disabilities long for and not any change in nomenclature.

We would like to reiterate that disability is not a divine gift. And the use of phrases like '*divyang*' in no way ensures de-stigmatisation or an end to discrimination on grounds of disability.

What needs to be addressed are stigma, discrimination and marginalisation that persons with disabilities are subjected to on account of the cultural, social, physical and attitudinal barriers that hinder their effective participation in the country's economic, social and political life.

The National Platform for the Rights of the Disabled (NPRD) and its affiliates are not the only ones who are voicing their opposition to the use of this term. Various other organisations have openly come out against this and several write-ups have also appeared in various prominent dailies.

We would therefore request you to refrain from using the term '*divyang*' and also shelve any plan that the government may be making to officially use this term.

With regards

Yours sincerely

(Muralidharan)
Secretary

NPRD Affiliates:

1. **Vikalangula Hakkula Jatiya Vedika, Andhra Pradesh**
2. **Bihar Viklang Adhikar Manch, Bihar**
3. **Delhi Viklang Adhikar Manch, Delhi**
4. **Viklang Adhikar Manch, Gujarat,**
5. **Haryana Viklang Adhikar Manch, Haryana**
6. **Jharkhand Viklang Morcha, Jharkhand**
7. **Karnataka Rajya Angavikalara Mattu Palakara Okkota**
8. **Differently-Abled Welfare Federation, Kerala**
9. **Lakshwadeep Disabled Welfare Association**
10. **Platform for Rights of Disabled, Odisha**
11. **Tamilnadu Assn for the Rights of Differently-Abled & Caregivers**
12. **Vikalangula Hakkula Jatiya Vedika, Telengana**
13. **Tripura Pratibandhi Adhikar Manch, Tripura**
14. **Paschim Banga Rajya Pratibandhi Sammelini, West Bengal**