TCI at COSP 18

‘Perceptions of Sentience’ Side Event

- From your advocacy work, especially with women with disabilities, how do misperceptions show up in real life, especially when it comes to bodily autonomy or decision-making? (3-minute response)

As a woman with psychosocial disability, I would first want to highlight the stereotypes and misperceptions associated with persons with psychosocial disabilities and how they affect our chances to make decisions about our own bodies. We are often seen as incapable of taking decisions because we apparently can’t understand anything, vulnerable, and in constant need of care and protection. At the same time, we are also labelled as dangerous, unpredictable, emotionally unstable or hysterical. Once we have a diagnosis or label of mental health condition, we are robbed of our legal capacity and hence substitute decision-making kicks in very quickly. Families, guardians, doctors, even the State can make decisions on our behalf, whether it’s about marriage, child custody, healthcare, or reproductive rights. Many women with psychosocial disabilities have shared that they were forcibly sterilized, put on contraception without their consent, or denied basic information about their bodies and intimate relationships. We are forcefully put into institutions, and all of this is justified as “protection,”. Even our sexuality is pathologized. We're either seen as asexual, not needing relationships or intimacy or hypersexual and therefore a danger to ourselves or others. There’s constant surveillance on who we love, who we marry, or whether we should become mothers at all. When abuse happens, it’s often ignored or not addressed and when we speak up, when we report violence or violations, we’re often not believed. Because of our disability status, our testimonies are dismissed or discredited. This is the real-life impact of being denied legal capacity. It means being denied the right to bodily autonomy, to safety, to consent and to full personhood.

- We’re here at COSP18 where policies are shaped. What is your message to the policymakers tonight? (4-minute response)

We are here at COSP18 and we can either transform lives or continue cycles of exclusion. My message to policymakers is simple but urgent: stop legislating control and start legislating dignity. For far too long, laws and policies have been written *about* persons with psychosocial disabilities, without us, especially women, girls, and gender-diverse people. And too often, these policies continue to treat us as objects of care, not as rights-holders. Policymakers must understand that coercion is not care, and institutions are not homes. If your mental health laws still allow for involuntary detention, if your guardianship laws still override the decisions of persons with psychosocial disabilities, if your reproductive health policies still ignore choice and consent, you are not compliant with the CRPD, and you are not protecting and upholding rights. We urge the policy makers to repeal discriminatory legislations that take away our legal capacity and abolish substitute decision making structures and recognize supported decision making mechanisms and processes in the law. Protect the fundamental rights of from harmful inhuman, cruel and degrading practices and treatments stripping them of their bodily autonomy. As we reflect on 20 years of the CRPD, we ask you to not only look forward, but also to look back. Recognize the harms caused by coercive practices**,** and ensure that survivors have access to formal reparations, healing, and justice**.** We also emphasize the need for meaningful participation**.** Policies that affect us must be developed with us**,** not for us. That means our OPDs must be included in policy design, action planning, budgeting, and monitoring. Redirect funding from institutions to community led and owned models that promote community inclusion, strengthen community support systems such as inclusive neighbourhoods, peer support, enable access to mainstream services etc. We have been doing these works in our communities and we request State Parties to fund what works. The CRPD is not a suggestion. It is a binding promise to uphold our personhood, autonomy, and freedom. And 20 years in, we will not accept half-baked ideas of inclusion. You have the power to shape policies that either supports us or control us. We are asking you to choose dignity, equality, justice and rights for persons with psychosocial disabilities.

- Before we end with our conversation tonight, I'd love to hear your quick reflection with one or two words on what do you think needs to change to make the world a more inclusive place for neurodiverse people? (1 minute response)

If I had to choose just two words, they would be trust and creativity.

Trust, because neurodiverse people and those with psychosocial disabilities, are so often doubted, dismissed, or overruled. Inclusion starts when we believe that people know what works for them.

Creativity: We need more creativity in how we think about inclusion and as a way of reshaping the world itself. Creativity means stretching or bending the contours of what we already know. It invites us to reimagine healing, expression, and well-being outside of conventional frameworks. Once creativity enters, it challenges rigidity, fixed norms, and the pressure to conform and it does so in good, necessary ways. We need this creative thinking to change laws, shape policies, and make space for what doesn't yet exist, but absolutely should. Thank you.