

## **DEAR PARTNERS, COLLEAGUES, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN**

I am very honored for having this opportunity to attend the Roundtable Forum. To meet all of you, to and learn about the work you have done – and to take part in the makings of the strategic direction for the future.

### **Lysbilde nr 1.**

FFO has been a partner and donor with SAFOD since 1999. This long- lasting partnership has been a good one, and we are pleased to see that SAFOD now again is prospering and has become a strong voice on behalf of its affiliates and people with disabilities in Southern Africa. In Norway, FFO has sometimes been criticized for our partnership. Some has argued that SAFOD is a regional federation and therefore operating on a different level than FFO. As you all may know – FFO is a national federation. On the other hand, the partnership has also been supported. Most importantly, NORAD (our back donor, The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation) has acknowledged and praised us for standing stood by SAFOD in the crisis that followed after the passing away of the late Director General Alexander Phiri.

Today we are very proud of SAFOD! To gather all of you, to appreciate achievements and to have the ambition to shape a strategic direction in the future – that is something that we are proud to be part of as a donor.

I want to encourage each and every one of you to contribute in discussions and come forward with whatever contributions you have to support SAFOD and its affiliates in the future.

As mentioned, FFO is a national federation while SAFOD is a regional. Regardless of being national or regional - A federation has its particular challenges. We have DPOs as members and we have to prioritize and balance

our interests and efforts so that all members feel that we represent them. That is part of the governance discussions that we have had with SAFOD many times over the years.

## **Lysbilde 2**

When SAFOD was down in 2012 and 2013, we had an extensive evaluation carried out to see if there was anything left to build on in the future. We found that the affiliates counted on SAFOD for support and guidance. (The evaluation will be presented later during this meeting, by the consultant Nyameka Mqikela.) The owners were clear on the added value of SAFOD.

To appreciate – or even celebrate – our achievements is something that we should do more often. The disability movement is of course concerned about all the serious issues that are related to disability and poverty, disability and lack of equity, disability and discrimination, disability and lack of participation – yes, the list of problems and challenges is long. And the challenges that persons with disabilities and their families meet are many.

Those of us who are involved in the disability movement know that patience is a virtue. Politics does not change overnight. Even if we have lobbied for e.g. change in legislation, and finally the parliament passes a bill, even then it may take years for the bill to come in to effect and make change happened. We are all aware that many countries have the most fantastic, disability-friendly laws but when it comes to implementing these laws...That may often be a whole different story. Therefore – victories – small or substantial - must be acknowledged, shared and celebrated!

SAFOD has managed to come out of the crisis in a successful way, and that is a substantial victory to celebrate! FFO has led SAFOD through a period of transition, and we are happy to say that we are now experiencing a SAFOD that is again vibrant and active under its current leadership.

### **Lysbilde 3**

SAFOD has managed to find the entry point into SADC. It was an important strategic choice to move the office from Malawi to Botswana - where the secretariat of SADC is situated. SAFOD needs to work very strategic with the affiliates towards SADC. In fact, it is stated in the agreement between FFO and SAFOD that one or two topics should be lobbied and advocated for, both on national level and SADC level. This way, both the national governments and the SADC body, will feel the pressure from both SAFOD and its affiliates. We are therefore looking forward to also see the draft SADC Disability Protocol on Friday.

### **Lysbilde 4**

DPOs have an important mission. There is no doubt about it. People with disabilities are marginalized, discriminated and have less access to services and benefits compared to the non-disabled population. This is a world- wide phenomenon, and in Southern Africa we have it documented. I would suppose that many of you have heard of the Living Conditions Studies among persons with disabilities. These surveys have been carried out by Sintef on behalf of FFO and SAFOD. They document the situation of persons with disabilities in the countries where they are carried out. Prof Arne Eide from Sintef will give you

an orientation about the findings and the impact of the studies later in the program.

All SAFOD countries have ratified the CRPD, except Botswana. Now, the CRPD is a powerful tool. The CRPD combined with the findings of the Living Conditions Studies is a powerful advocacy tool.

### **Lysbilde 5.**

Norway is a relatively small and transparent country. We have only a population of 5.5 mill. We have a variety of resources, a long coastline, lots of rain, oil – and probably the most generous welfare system in the world. Still people with disabilities face many obstacles. Human Rights, the fulfillment of CRPD, are still an issue. Exclusion, segregation, deprivation of rights to name some.

But even so - the government highly supports FFO. Why? Because they've learned that DPOs contribute. – with experiences, ideas and competencies. We all come in many shapes and figures. Given the chance to participate – effectively and organized- everyone is a resource – and not a burden. In short - inclusion is highly profitable - exclusion definitely the opposite. In this perspective - why should African governments not do the same?

My understanding is that the governments in this region hardly support civil society in general and neither DPOs. I would like to encourage Norad, when they have bilateral cooperation with countries in the global south, to encourage the funding of CSOs and DPOs. That would increase the sustainability of the DPOs.

FFO is also happy about the fact that SAFOD highlights the challenge of convincing donor agencies to mainstream disability among donor agencies. These discussions will be very interesting. This is also an issue in Norway – and part of our activities directed towards Norwegian “mainstream” donor agencies: to include disability in their projects. This is obviously important work.

To wrap up: I congratulate you on celebrating 30 years – and going strong forward. Doing so I will share with you a piece of FFOs latest achievement (here represented by the cake we enjoyed celebrating). This past week, after years of lobbying, we finally got the approval of our government to start the work on establishing a comprehensive strategic plan for people with disabilities. What was the reason for success? Foremost – one common voice – FFO and all of our DPO members sending the same message, the CRPD – and our work with writing the alternative report, and patience and persistency.

I will enjoy these 4 for days and hope to learn a lot more about your work.