

September 21, 1981

INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS WORKSHOP - VOKSENKOLLEN

Dear guests and participants!

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to Norway and to this International Red Cross Workshop, dealing with "The Community and the Disabled". The Norwegian Government is actively engaged in problems regarding the quality of life, and we clearly see the relation between integration and participation in all walks of society and life.

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The task with which we are faced in dealing with the problems of the disabled is not only - and perhaps not even primarily - to make it easier for the disabled to participate in the life of the community. The main task is to reshape our society so that it will accommodate the disabled. This will necessitate the provision of new facilities in the

fields of education, employment and housing. Changes will also be required in the construction and design of buildings as well as in relation to traffic conditions.

But more than anything else, it requires a greater degree of compassion and tolerance as well as the will to accept those who are different from most of us in our daily lives as equal members of society. Today, lack of tolerance is possibly the greatest obstacle in particular to the mentally disabled to be able to live in our society on equal terms with the rest of us.

I have emphasized these points of view because I believe they are of great importance but also because they are the foundations on which the Norwegian Government basis its work in dealing with the problems of the disabled.

In international terms it is clear that the problems facing the disabled in the poorest countries of the world are infinitely greater than those in for example Norway. In these countries it is a task of vital importance to give the disabled self-confidence and faith in their own future. For us in the richer countries, it is essential to provide active support and impulses to the authorities and organizations in less developed countries so that the disabled there may be given greater means to enjoy a fuller and more rewarding life.

In declaring this workshop open, I do so in the hope that you may be able to inspire each other in the work to create a society to which the disabled belong as

fully integrated citizens working beside us in ordinary
life.

Thank you.