

**STATEMENT BY HON RICHARD QUASHIGAH TO
COMMOMERATE INTERNATIONAL DAY AGAINST PERSONS
WITH DISABILITY ON 23RD JUNE, 2015**

Mr Speaker, I thank you for giving me the opportunity to make this statement to commemorate the International Day against disability.

According the World Health Organisation, (WHO) there are more than 600 million disabled persons in the world, approximately 80% live in low-income countries.

In most developing countries including Ghana, disabled persons constitute an impoverished marginalized group. In Ghana, it is estimated that twenty percent of the population constitute people living with disabilities, a group, often perceived by some as unproductive and incapable of contributing in a positive way to society and rather seen as constituting an economic burden on the family.

Mr. Speaker, as we commemorate this day set aside as International Disability Day, I crave your indulgence to focus on the visually impaired. According to the World Health Organisation, over 285million persons are visually impaired worldwide with over 39 million being totally blind. Out of this number, 7.1 million persons are from Africa that represents 1% of all Africans.

The situation is no better in Ghana. Although there appears to be no definite statistics it is obvious that the numbers are quite significant. Mr. Speaker, these persons with visual disability, are citizens like the rest of us and thus have a right to proper functioning and also the right to their personal as well as national development. The basic mobility aid tool for these persons is the WHITE CANE.

Mr. Speaker, mobility canes have been with man for as long as blindness or loss of sight has been around. However, the white cane as we know it today; is not just a tool that can be used to achieve independence; it is a symbol of the blind citizens in our society.

The white cane provides effective means for blind students to get to school; blind adults to get to work, aged to remain active unfortunately the cost of procuring a white cane is often beyond the pockets of those who need it.

② RT Hon Speaker

The white cane is a symbol for them, their safety; and also for the safety and education of others.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to use this opportunity to call on individuals and corporate institutions as well as Members of this August House to assist our visually impaired brothers and sisters acquire more white canes as a way of promoting independent movement.

The use of the white cane has the potential of preventing visually impaired persons from bodily harm and also helps raise their profile of independence.

* Seated at the Gallery are some of our visually impaired brothers and sisters with white canes

Although every blind person needs this essential mobility tool, most persons are unable to afford it. A white cane am informed cost seventeen Ghana Cedis (GH¢17.00)

Mr. Speaker, should each of us Members of this August House decide to purchase five white canes in solidarity with our visually impaired brothers and sisters, there would be available to them twenty three thousand three hundred and seventy five white canes.

In Greater Accra alone, the Ghana Blind Union has 321 registered members. Out of this number, 55% do not have mobility canes.

Further, in the Eastern Region, there are 751 visually impaired persons. Again, 58.4 of this number do not have canes.

Mr. Speaker, statistics on the visually impaired in other regions of Ghana are not encouraging either.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to give a brief background to this simple but crucial tool. Prior to the 1920s, a staff or cane was used by blind persons for basic mobility. At this point, the cane was not painted white. In other words, it was just a staff or stick for walking.

It was primarily during the period between 1921 and 1931 that the white cane gained popularity and was promoted as a tool and symbol through Europe by the media and the Rotary Club.

The white cane is a symbol of blindness. It provides and informs the immediate environment that the holder of the cane is either blind or partially sighted. In many cases it saves the user

from having to ask for mobility help since the environment is already aware of the meaning of the white cane as a symbol of blindness. The white cane does not only enhance the mobility of its users, but it also protects them against ditches along routes, paths and sometimes from drivers who are unable to notice a visually impaired pedestrian easily.

Mr. Speaker, with proper training, users of the white cane can enjoy greater mobility and safety by determining exactly where and when they want to go somewhere. The white cane has also provided the freedom to blind persons to travel independently to their schools and workplaces and to participate more fully in the life of their communities and society as a whole.

Today, June 23rd, being National Disability Day, we must reflect on our vulnerable section of our population. How can we make life easier for them? What have we as a nation done to make sure that a basic mobility aid like the white cane is available to our brothers and sisters who need it?

Mr. Speaker, in spite of the provision in the nation's disability law which some consider inadequate, I call on this House and all stakeholders for more pragmatic efforts in reducing further the barriers that hamper the inclusion of our physically challenged brothers and sisters in all facets of society.

Thank you Mr. Speaker.

