

CHENNAI DECLARATION

The National Conference on Museums and Persons with Disabilities, “Enabling Museums”, organized by the Regional Museum of Natural History (RMNH) Mysore in collaboration with the Tamil Nadu Science & Technology Centres (TNSTC) in Chennai during 14-16 February 2008, recommends the following, which may be called as Chennai Declaration on Museums and Persons with Disabilities.

1. Recognizes the Mysore Declaration on Museums and Disabled, (which was released during the National Workshop on Museum Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities organized by the Regional Museum of Natural History, Mysore during 31 January to 2 February 2007) as the first national level instrument in the field of Museums and Persons with Disabilities.
2. For the purpose of this Declaration, the term “Museum” will also include institutions declared as Museums as well as other informal learning settings/institutions such as Zoos, Archives, Science Centres, and Protected Areas etc.
3. Recognises the importance of the existing national level instruments related to Persons with Disabilities, with requests to the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment to include Museums as one example of public space/buildings in future amendments to the following national instruments:
 - 3.1 Persons with Disability (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995, and
 - 3.2 National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2006.
4. All Museums shall undertake the following
 - 4.1 Accessibility to be included in the policy or mission statement,
 - 4.2 Regular training programmes for museum staff regarding the specific needs of Persons with Disabilities. This may include Sensitisation programmes,
 - 4.3 Fill up 3% quota for Persons with Disabilities,
 - 4.4 Designate one staff as Accessibility Coordinator responsible for all aspects of Museum accessibility to Persons with Disabilities,
 - 4.5 Museums need to have regular Visitor Studies in order to find out how many Persons with Disabilities visit Museums and how many do not, as well as the reasons for their non-visitation,
5. Funding agencies including the Government, shall make the provisions of the following national instruments (relevant to the Persons with Disabilities in public space/buildings) as mandatory for funding of Museums:
 - 5.1 Persons with Disability (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995, and
 - 5.2 National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2006

- 6 It is recommended that the following provisions of the Persons with Disability (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995 may be applicable to Museum with additions/modifications (given below as underlined):
 - 6.1 Under the Chapter on Non-discrimination, “The appropriate Governments and the local authorities and Museums shall, within the limits of their economic capacity and development, provide for: (a) ramps in public buildings and Museums, (b)adaptation of toilets for wheel chair users, (c) Braille symbols and auditory signals in elevators or lifts”.
- 7 It is recommended that the following provisions of the National Policy on Persons with Disabilities (2006) may be applicable to Museums with additions/modifications (given below underlined):
 - 7.1 Under the head Barrier-free environment, “Public buildings/ places/ transportation systems, museums etc. shall be made barrier free through design changes, use of appropriate material and strict adherence to building bye-laws, space standards for barrier-free built environment”.
 - 7.2 Under the head Education,
 - 7.2.1 “Teaching/learning tools and aids such as educational toys, Braille/talking books, appropriate software etc. will be made available,
 - 7.2.2 Sign language, Alternative and Augmentative Communications (AAC) modes as a viable medium in inter personal communication will be recognized, standardized and popularized,
 - 7.2.3 Personal mobility through aids and appliances and inter-personnel communication through electronic devices will be enhanced.”
 - 7.3 Under the head Assistive Devices and Personal Mobility
 - 7.3.1 “Personal mobility will be enhanced through aids and appliances, which will be continuously upgraded,
 - 7.3.2 Communication needs of the persons with disabilities will be addressed through making information service and public documents accessible. Braille, tape-service, large print and other appropriate technologies will be used to provide information for the persons with visual impairment, while appropriate technologies would be provided to persons with hearing impairment. Use of sign language in all public functions including those in Museum will be encouraged,
- 8 Regarding Accessible Museum Buildings and Physical Infrastructure, the following recommendations are submitted:
 - 8.1 Museums shall have to organize annual Access Audits of Buildings and Physical Infrastructure, which should be made mandatory for any funding,
 - 8.2 Entry to Museums and guidance should be made free to all PwD.
 - 8.3 There should be separate queue for PwD.

- 8.4 As noise disturbs, it must be kept minimum in all buildings, parking areas and other physical infrastructure.
- 8.5 Well organized universally accepted signages/orientation boards must be made available at the entrance itself so as to guide/ orient PwD for the visit to the Museum.
- 8.6 Wheel chairs (small, medium and large) must be made available for the benefit of mobility impaired visitors.
- 8.7 There should be a sensitizing zone or an orientation/visitor centre at the reception area of each Museum with all assistive devices such as audio, video, computer facilities so as to help orient the Visitors who are PwD before the actual visit to the Museum galleries.
- 8.8 Carpet floorings should be replaced by corrugated floorings with particular colours.
- 8.9 Doors in Museums should preferably be with automatic/sliding doors.
- 9 Regarding Accessible Museum Communication/Exhibition, the following recommendations are submitted:
 - 9.1 Universal design shall be one of the underlying principles for Museum communication/ exhibition,
 - 9.2 Every Museum should have a separate space or area or activity/discovery centre where original exhibits as well as models of key/ major exhibits are available for PwD to “touch and feel” so as to make the museum visit an enjoyable experience.
 - 9.3 Activity corners should include simple activities which can be done by special persons and which help in behavioural modification
 - 9.4 There should be more interactive exhibits with audio, video and digital aids as well as touch-screen kiosks.
 - 9.5 Labels in galleries should be in large fonts, with key words to be highlighted in bold/underlined.
 - 9.6 Along with the normal exhibition labels, there should be alternate forms such as Braille.
- 10 Regarding Accessible Museum Education/Programmes, the following recommendations are submitted:
 - 10.1 While planning for education/programmes for Persons with Disabilities, the requirements of Visitors and Non-visitors shall have to be considered equally,
 - 10.2 Regular Visitor Studies shall be undertaken to understand the specific requirements of PwD and the reasons for their non-visitation,
 - 10.3 Provisions of the service of education to Persons with Disabilities by Museums must include all the four categories of educational service such as interpretation (arranging interpretive services inside the Museum), extension (extending the service to regular visitors), out-reach (organising programmes outside so as to

reach out to non-visitors) and in-reach (organising new programmes inside Museum to attract non-visitors).

10.4 Each Museum should arrange a variety of educational/creative activities as well as training workshops so as to attract the various categories of PwD to Museums.

10.5 Each Museum should have at least one trained educational staff with knowledge of sign language so as to help guide the PwD.

- 11 Professional agencies in Museums in India (such as Museum Associations of India, Indian National Committee of the International Council of Museums etc), training institutions/University Departments of Museology etc shall include Museum Accessibility Studies in their training programmes/syllabi.
- 12 In order to undertake the above-mentioned recommendations, and to develop the subject of Museum Access Studies as a professional one, it is recommended to the Government of India, its various Ministries/Agencies and all other stakeholders dealing with Museums and Persons with Disabilities, to establish a National Centre for Museum Access Studies (NC-MAS).

Sd/-

Signed on behalf of the participants by
Dr. B. Venugopal, Coordinator of the National Conference

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