



Down Syndrome
Association
Mongolia



NON-DISCRIMINATION, INCLUSION, AND EQUALITY THROUGH COMBATTING THE DEROGATORY USE OF THE WORD “MONGOL” IN RELATION TO THE PEOPLE WITH DOWN SYNDROME

Monday 1 December, 2023 at 06.30 pm

New York, UNHQ, CR6

To commemorate the International Day of People with disabilities, the Permanent Mission of Mongolia to the United Nations and the Down Syndrome Association of Mongolia is organizing a panel discussion followed by screening of the award-winning movie “Trio”.

1. Background and Rationale

The word "Mongol" has different associations in different parts of the world. While it generally refers to a person from Mongolia, it's also been used as a derogatory term for a person with Down's syndrome, as well as an insult for someone considered "stupid." This negative connotation traces back to the 19th century when pseudoscience of ethnic classification and phrenology were prevalent. John Langdon Down, who identified Down syndrome, classified people with the condition as "Mongolian Idiots," claiming that they shared some facial characteristics of the "Mongoloid" race, a racist classification used in the West to describe people from Mongolia, China, and Japan.

In the 1960s, geneticists and medical professionals advocated for the replacement of the term "Mongolian Idiot" with "Down's Syndrome" due to the underlying racism associated with the former. Despite these efforts, the negative associations between "Mongol," Down's syndrome, and “stupidity” persist today.

Media, films, and pop culture have a powerful influence on how we view the world, and seemingly innocuous use of the term "Mongol" can perpetuate harmful stereotypes and further undermine human dignity. In the 21st century, digital platforms have further amplified the impact of language and the need to use words responsibly. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize that "Mongol" should only be used in its original and authentic meaning to avoid perpetuating harmful stereotypes and to allow people of Mongolian origin to exercise their human rights that are equal in dignity.

Furthermore, people of Mongolian origin condemn the use of the term as an insult and rightfully claim their identity. Regrettably, some have even suggested that people of Mongolian origin are at higher risk of having Down Syndrome, a dangerous stereotype that lacks empirical evidence and only serves to perpetuate harmful stereotypes. This illustrates the weight of words and how stereotyping can harm not only those who are intended to be hurt but also those associated with a particular group.

In this context, Mongolia strives to raise awareness against using terms such as "Mongols," "Mongoloid," and "Mongolism" in derogatory ways.

2. Objectives

The objective of this event is to raise awareness against the derogatory use of terms such as "Mongol," "Mongoloid," and "Mongolism," especially in relation to Down syndrome. The event's primary goal is to highlight the negative impact of using these terms on people with Down syndrome, as it infringes on their human rights and perpetuates harmful stereotypes. Furthermore, the event aims to address how such use promotes discrimination against people of Mongolian origin. The event will facilitate discussions on concrete measures to address this issue, taking into account the roles of various entities, including Member States, UN, other international organizations and agencies, non-governmental organizations, and stakeholders. The discussions will focus on combatting racism, hate speech and promoting human rights, inclusion, non-discrimination, and equality.

Furthermore, the event will feature the internationally acclaimed and award-winning movie "TRIO" as an example of how art and motion pictures can be used in advocacy campaigns to change global perceptions, defend human rights, and support the goal of leaving no one behind.

3. Agenda

The panel discussion will be limited to one hour, during which the panelists will provide their opening statements and initial presentations. This will be followed by a two-part interactive discussion with the audience, allowing for their input and questions to be addressed. Finally, the panelists will provide their concluding remarks to summarize the key points of the discussion.

Moderator: **Mr. Ganzorig Vanchig**, Founding member and advisor of Down Syndrome Association Mongolia

Opening statement:

06:30-pm 06:35 pm **H.E. Mr. Enkhbold Vorshilov**, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Mongolia to the UN (TBC)

Panel Discussion:

06:35 pm – 07:20 pm **Facundo Chavez Penillas**, Human Rights and Disability Adviser, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (pre-recorded video)

Paul Zanon, Advisor, Asia Pacific Down Syndrome Federation (pre-recorded video)

Werner H Obermeyer, Director, WHO Office at the United Nations in New York

Uuganaa Ramsay, Founder and Director, Mongol Identity, International NGO of Scotland

Dr. Zolzaya Bold, Linguist and Chair of Mongolian-Canadian Association, NGO

07.20-07.35 pm **Q&A**

07.35-09.15 pm **Screening of the award-winning movie “Trio”**

4. Expected outcomes

The anticipated results of this event are as follows:

- Representatives of the UN Member States and other concerned parties will gain knowledge regarding the human rights issues linked to the disparaging use of the term "Mongol" concerning individuals with Down syndrome;
- UN will take the required measures, such as incorporating the issue in a relevant resolution that calls for refraining from using the term "Mongol" derogatorily in relation to individuals with Down syndrome and taking necessary steps to prevent hatred and discrimination.