The International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI) has rewarded the Palestinian leader, Rima Canawati with the International Leadership Award for the outstanding service to ICEVI and children and young people with a visual impairment.
Palestinian Woman with Visual Impairment Wins International Leadership Award

The Award ceremony that was held on Wednesday in Orlando, honoured Canawati’s exceptional leadership and development skills.

“The determination Rima has shown in persuading the government of Palestine to honour its obligations to children and young people with a visual impairment and in holding them to their commitments in very difficult political circumstances,’ as described by ICEVI President, Colin Low.

According to ICEVI, 285 million people are estimated to be visually impaired worldwide: 39 million are blind and 246 million have low vision. In addition, about 90% of the world’s visually impaired live in low-income settings, and the girl child with visual impairment receives less attention and is doubly discriminated against. However, despite total vision loss, being a Palestinian woman, and living under occupation, Canawati has achieved so much for the people with vision impairment, whether it was to insure that they get an appropriate education or integrate in the job market.
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Canawati established The Vision Rehabilitation Department at the Bethlehem Arab Society for Rehabilitation (BASR), an achievement that proved to be one of its kind in Palestine. She is currently the Program Development Officer at BASR, and has over 22 years' experience in disability and inclusive development work. She is a member of the Palestinian Higher Council of the Affairs of People with Disabilities, Deputy Chair of the West Asia Regional Committee of the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI), Vice Chair of CBM-EMR Regional Advisory Committee, a member of CBM’s "Community of Practice" on Inclusive Education, and the country representative of the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network of the World Council of Churches – Middle East.

In 2009, she was awarded the International Service Human Rights Award for her contributions and long struggle for defending the human rights of people with disabilities and her advocacy and lobbying efforts for mainstreaming persons with disabilities in all aspects of development. In addition, she was a speaker at the UN High Level Meeting on Disability and Development on behalf of civil society in September 2013.

In addition to her long list of achievements, Canawati also initiated the establishment of a resource centre at Bethlehem University to support students with visual impairments and offer them equal access to quality higher education and study materials in accessible format. She played a prominent role in empowering young persons with visual impairments and educating them about their rights to inclusion and full participation in education and in society at large. This is in addition to her role in lobbying parents of children with visual impairments to organize themselves in a Parents Association to promote and advocate the rights of persons with vision impairments, especially their right to access quality education in inclusive environments.

She also lobbied the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education for the implementation of a national program on the educational inclusion of persons with impaired vision, as part of her advocacy and lobbying efforts for mainstreaming persons with disabilities in all aspects of development. She serves as the Secretariat of the EFAVI program supporting the Ministry in the effective management and implementation of the EFAVI national program.
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ICEVI is a global association of individuals and organizations that promotes equal access to appropriate education for all children and youth with visual impairment so that they may achieve their full potential. This website includes information that is relevant not only to ICEVI in general, but, most importantly, to the activities that take place in the seven regions of ICEVI.

ICEVI, which was formerly known as ICEVH, is a professional non-governmental organization that welcomes any group or person who wishes to support its aims. It was formed in 1952 and has met as an international group once in every five years. Since 2002, the general body of ICEVI meets once in four years.