People with intellectual disabilities are the most marginalized population in the world.
Definition of intellectual disability:

Intellectual disabilities can be defined as significant limitations in cognitive functioning and adaptive behavior with onset by 18 years of age. Intellectual disabilities can be either genetic or acquired (e.g., Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, autism, traumatic brain injury).

Epidemiological studies report a significant correlation between poverty and the prevalence of intellectual disabilities (Emerson, 2007). The United Nations Development Program estimates that 80% of all people with disabilities reside in low-income countries (Groce, 2011). While people with disabilities represent one in ten people worldwide, they are one in every five of the world’s poorest people (Groce, 2011).

At present, more than 70% of Special Olympics athletes (more than 2,800,000 people) live in developing countries. Poverty and disability are mutually reinforcing, and disability can be understood as both a cause and a consequence of poverty (World Report on Disability, 2011).

People with intellectual disabilities remain the most marginalized and discriminated-against population in the world. This transcends national, cultural and socio-economic boundaries.

“People with intellectual disabilities remain the most marginalized and discriminated-against population in the world. This transcends national, cultural and socio-economic boundaries.”

Florinda P. Wiesner
Chair of the 2011 Special Olympics

SCOPE OF THE WORLD’S POPULATION WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

More than 200 Million People in the world have intellectual disabilities, making it the largest disability group worldwide.

1-3% of the world’s population has an intellectual disability affecting all countries, societies and communities worldwide. (World Health Organization)
About Special Olympics

Special Olympics is a global organization that unleashes the human spirit through the transformative power and joy of sport every day around the world. Through programming in sports, health, education and community building, Special Olympics changes the lives of people with intellectual disabilities and raises awareness about their talents and abilities— as well as the injustice, isolation, intolerance and inactivity they face.

Special Olympics’ mission currently reaches more than 4.2 million athletes with intellectual disabilities, 1.3 million coaches and volunteers and millions more families, young people, supporters and fans through 220 Accredited Special Olympics Programs in 170 countries.

ATHLETES SERVED

4.2 Million

40,841

COACHES & VOLUNTEERS

1.3 Million

Community-based competitions

70,000

More than
every year around the world

• 32 Olympic-type sports
• Programs in 170 countries
• Dynamic partnerships at all geographic levels in sports, health and education.

REAL SPORTS

Special Olympics provides high quality training and competition in an inclusive culture that encourages athletic excellence, new levels of determination, emphasizes health and celebrates personal achievements.

SUSTAINING ATHLETE HEALTH

Special Olympics is committed to ensuring ongoing access to quality, community-based healthcare that promotes the overall well-being of athletes with intellectual disabilities. Special Olympics is the largest public health platform in the world partnering with healthcare practitioners globally to offer free screenings at competitions, games and other venues.

TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

In order to promote acceptance, friendships, positive attitudes and behavioral changes, Special Olympics equips young people and adult influencers with effective tools and training to foster inclusive action and attitudes within their schools, social networks and communities.

BUILDING COMMUNITY

Special Olympics mobilizes resources, implements diverse programming and brings diverse stakeholders together to drive positive attitudinal change toward people with intellectual disabilities—creating more inclusive, accepting and cohesive communities worldwide.

REAL
SPORTS

SUSTAINING
ATHLETE
HEALTH

TRANSFORMATIVE
EDUCATION

BUILDING
COMMUNITY

Sports

Health

Education

Community

Special Olympics IMPACT

Sports

Education

Real Sports

Sustaining Athlete Health

Transformative Education

Building Community

Real
Sports

Sustaining Athlete Health

Transformative Education

Building Community

Sports

Health

Education

Community

Special Olympics IMPACT

Sports

Health

Education

Community

Special Olympics IMPACT

Sports

Health

Education

Community

Special Olympics IMPACT

Sports

Health

Education

Community
There is a significant correlation between poverty and the prevalence of intellectual disabilities. An estimated 80% of all people with disabilities reside in low-income countries. People with intellectual disabilities and their families typically fall at the bottom of the economic spectrum in communities and across countries.

Educational Neglect
• Globally, most children with intellectual disabilities do not attend school at all.
• At least 10% of children with disabilities in the developing world are denied the right to education.
• As a result of lack of schooling, health education delivered to students in schools never reaches children with intellectual disabilities.
• Children with intellectual disabilities are more at risk of sexual abuse and harassment. (Johnson, I., Sigler R. 2000. Journal of Interpersonal Violence)
• As many as 83% of females and 32% of males are victims of sexual assault. (Johnson, I., Sigler R. 2000. Journal of Interpersonal Violence)

Abuse
• Among adults who have developmental and intellectual disabilities, as many as 85% of females and 57% of males are victims of sexual assault. (Johnson, I., Sigler R. 2000. Journal of Interpersonal Violence)
• Reports about the mistreatment of individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities, including physical and sexual abuse, consistently demonstrate levels of neglect and other abuse occurring at rates much higher than in the population without intellectual disabilities, especially in institutions. (Disability Rights International Country reports, Jones L et al, 2012, World Report on Disability, 2012)

Societal & Environmental Challenges
• People with intellectual disabilities and their families typically fall at the bottom of the economic spectrum in communities and across countries. (Emerson, E, Disability Rights International Country Reports, 2007)
• Families of children with intellectual disabilities face extraordinarily stress.
• People with intellectual disabilities have lower levels of employment than the general population or other disability groups.
• Much of the public across all societies hold attitudes about people with intellectual disabilities that reflect low expectations of competence and high expectations of problems.
• In many cultures, inaccurate understandings about intellectual disabilities, cultural beliefs and just plain fear cause people to actively discriminate against people with intellectual disabilities and their families, producing stigma, isolation (including forced containment), taunting, neglect, physical abuse, and, sometimes death, including infanticide.

People with intellectual disabilities and their families typically fall at the bottom of the economic spectrum in communities and across countries.
The leadership and support of governments, organizations, corporations and individuals of the global community can change the face and destiny of this population which has been neglected, denied and oppressed for too long.

Access to Healthcare
• 200,000,000 people with intellectual disabilities are denied access to quality health services.
• Despite the severe need and higher health risk, people with intellectual disabilities are denied health services, community interventions, and there is a lack of targeted interventions and programs for this population (WHO 2011, SGI 2007).
• The public believes that people with intellectual disabilities have better health care than the rest of the population, yet people with disabilities experience poorer health than the general population and have unequal access to health care services (WHO 2011, SGI 2007).
• Levels of disease, conditions and access to care for the population with intellectual disabilities are significantly poorer than for the general population.
• Due to isolation, neglect and forced detention, people with intellectual disabilities often do not access community health interventions.

Access to Sports
• People with intellectual disabilities experience chronic health problems due to deficient care, poor nutrition and sedentary lifestyles. This is exacerbated by lack of accessible ongoing sports/recreation programs that stress fitness, skill development and quality coaching and competition.
• Only 2% of people with intellectual disabilities participate in Special Olympics.
• In virtually all countries in which Special Olympics operates, it started because there were either no or limited options for people with intellectual disabilities to be physically active.
• Despite the social, financial or other demographic barriers, every individual deserves and needs the chance to be physically active.

The leadership and support of governments, organizations, corporations and individuals of the global community can change the face and destiny of this population which has been neglected, denied and oppressed for too long.

Join Special Olympics in the fight for equality and dignity for all.

Kofi Annan
Former U.N. Secretary General

Throughout the ages, the treatment of people with disabilities has brought out some of the worst aspects of human nature. Societies have often gone out of their way to ensure that persons with disabilities are neither seen nor heard. We must continue to work to ensure that all persons with disabilities have the same opportunities, the same rights and the same freedom.

Kofi Annan
Former U.N. Secretary General
The late Eunice Kennedy Shriver founded Special Olympics in 1968 with the goal of using the common vehicle of sport to demonstrate the abilities and humanity of those with intellectual disabilities thereby reducing the intolerance, isolation and discrimination they face and increasing their ability to participate fully in the communities in which they live.

Nearly 50 years later, the global Special Olympics Movement continues to be fueled by millions of people – families, coaches, volunteers, students, supporters and fans – all committed to achieving equality for people with intellectual disabilities. But despite significant progress, too many barriers still stand. Every day, in communities around the world, people with intellectual disabilities face stigma and stereotypes in all aspects of their lives – in recreation, education, employment, housing, health, and more. The Special Olympics Movement is leading the fight to change this.

In response, through its global grassroots network and the catalytic power of sport, Special Olympics convenes diverse stakeholders in communities around the world – from across government, business and civil society – to elevate awareness of the talents, as well as the needs, of people with intellectual disabilities. The goal is to advance global cooperation around their rights and to ensure that neither they nor their families are excluded from the communities in which they live.

Let me win.
But if I cannot win,
let me be brave in the attempt.
Special Olympics Athlete oath

Join Special Olympics in the fight for equality and dignity for all.
Special Olympics athletes are an inspiration for all of us. Every day they have to fight to overcome not only their disability, but also the discrimination they face. In this they are not just athletes, but real heroes to be celebrated and supported.

The needs of the intellectually disabled remain achingly unaddressed in the developing world. Though they face uncommon challenges, the intellectually disabled don’t demand uncommon treatment.

Instead, like people everywhere, they seek only to be treated equally and fairly, and to be provided the same opportunities as anyone else.

*Ban Ki-Moon*
United Nations Secretary General

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