

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

The Cape Town Declaration (16th October 2011)

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We recognise that people with psychosocial disabilities have been viewed in bad ways, with derogatory words being used to describe us such as mentally disturbed, having unsound minds, idiots, lunatics, imbeciles and many other hurtful labels.

We are people first! We have potentials, abilities, talents and each of us can make a great contribution to the world. We in the past, presently and in the future, have, do and will continue to make great contributions if barriers are removed.

We believe in an Africa in which all people are free to be themselves and to be treated with dignity. We are all different, unique and our differences should be appreciated as an issue of diversity. We need all people to embrace this diversity. Diversity is beautiful.

There can be no mental health without our expertise. We are the knower's and yet we remain the untapped resource in mental health care. We are the experts. We want to be listened to and to fully participate in our life decisions. We must be the masters of our life journeys.

We want, like everyone else, to vote. We want to marry, form relationships, have fulfilled family lives, raise children, and be treated as others in the workplace with equal remuneration for equal work.

For as long as others decide for us, we do not have rights. No one can speak for us. We want to speak for ourselves.

We want to be embraced with respect and love.

We are deeply concerned about the extent of suffering experienced by our brothers and sisters on our vast continent. Poverty, human rights violations and psychosocial disability go hand in hand. We know that there can be no dignity where poverty exists. No medicines or sophisticated western technology can eradicate poverty and restore dignity.

The history of psychiatry haunts our present. Our people remain chained and shackled in institutions and by ideas which our colonisers brought to our continent.

We want everyone to acknowledge their participation in calling us names and treating us as

lesser beings. These are the barriers to our full enjoyment of life. These barriers are disabling us and these prevent us from fully participating in society.

We wish for a better world in which all people are treated equally, a world where human rights belong to everyone. We invite you to walk beside us. We know where we want to go’.

The Pan African Network of People with Psychosocial Disabilities is a collective voice to promote and protect the rights and dignity of people with psychosocial disabilities on the African continent. It was formerly established in 2005 in Kampala, Uganda. The 2nd Congress was held in 2011 in Cape Town and a Declaration was issued that outlines the principles and values of the Network (see www.panusp.org/).