Embrace Me!

Let me create a scenario for you, suppose you had NO relatives or someone close with a disability and you randomly see me or anyone with a disability in public won't you cast judgement and say we are dependent both mentally and physically? I have said this before, and I will say it again I do not blame you, rather, I blame society and its skewed perception of what ideal should be, which turns many of our population into a state of dependence, disable or not.

Society forces restrictions upon us that inculcates our mental ability to only see what they have taught us (meaning we are dependent because of society's very rules and lack of will to change such laws). Leaders in our society only know what they have been taught and choose to implement what they alone see fit, yet we have to abide by what they put forward for us to follow. This is the very reason why we as Persons Living with Disabilities (PWDs) are still fighting for equality and our fundamental HUMAN RIGHTS to fully access basic amenities. Imagine in these modern times, we still depend on the same number of educational institutions to accept us. These very institutions that is sidelined as priority in bringing up to standard, curriculums that see the potential of every child with a disability shine and in the future, be personally independent and assets to society.

As I said we are still fight for equality while others are almost done fighting for equity. Parents I will come to you in a bit but think about this, you think short term solutions will ever suffice compared to seeing your child long term progress? Our very leaders constantly put forward short term solutions, our managers, our executives of business have no clue about our abilities and potential. Why because what do they care? Therefore, the sacrifice starts now and starts with you.

Let me now briefly describe myself, Hi, I'm Shamla Maharaj. ☺ I was born with Cerebral Palsy, in my case it happened during birth as a result of negligence which deprived oxygen from going to my brain resulting in brain damage. This negatively affected my motor skills.. My CP is mixed, I have spastic, ataxic, and atnethold. I am considered severe with in the category of atnethold and spastic respectfully. I am unable to stand, I have no balance, I have involuntary body movements and as you may have noticed I can only use one hand because I have no control on one side of my body (It has a mind of its own ☺). I can go on and on about the intricacies of CP but I won't bore you.

I was asked to speak on the theme "embrace me" which is basically embracing the potential in each one of us. Let me draw reference to myself why not? I mean I have lived it. For those of you who do not know me, you see me shake I use one hand, I kick and I stutter especially when nervous. Does that make me different NO! Does it make me unique? You see everything is about perception and the power of perception not only will determine the outlook of your future but the future of someone else. Disability is just a word I was once a child with a disability just like the children in this room. But you know my parents never allowed my disability to determine my future. I myself have never and will never think about myself as different, why? Because I have the ability just like each of you have the ability to make a positive contribution to this society.

As a proud person with a disability, I will now explain a little bit about what I do only to prove that each child in this room and by extension any child with a disability can be productive once they are given a mere opportunity. For this month I have 5 assignments, I have deadlines to meet outside of school, I have my full time job. I accept challenges like any other and that sees me grow as an individual and push me to defy my own self. In 2013 I was invited by UNESCO's Director General to be one of their opening speakers along with herself in which I was the only person with a disability, all I knew that this was not for me rather it was for my country. If I can do it your child most definitely can do and do even more.

Parents I come back to you, I want you to think about your very child at the age of let’s say 18, earning their own income through their creative genius, whether through their academic knowledge or talents or even creativity. The victory dance you would give after will beat any struggles’. But I am going to tell you boldly, you cannot sit and wait for it to happen or some divine intervention of policies being implemented that gives your child what they deserve, IT WILL NEVER HAPPEN. You need to get up and create those very accommodations. Break rules I say, your child is no different therefore, treat them no differently. Do you think about the day you leave this earth and your child behind? Would short term objectives see your child fending for themselves. No matter the severity of the disability I am sure your child smiles when they see something they like or frown when they do not like something. Allow them their independence, think long term. Listen to them, allow them to express themselves and please do not be overprotective. Expose them allow them to feel the joys of hurt and the sorrow of happiness…think about that ☺. If your child are to become an accomplished individuals you have to suffer now, sacrifice now….but believe me the tougher the effort the shorter the journey before you start seeing results. These very results will open up doors of experiences that you yourself will be left in awe.

This may be controversial but I will say it anyways, if you see anyone “without a disability” dress up as a clown, whether makeup, clothes, character we usually judge them by only that aspect and not by their ability to do things. So why judge a child with a disability. Why aren’t provisions put in place to help develop a child with a disability’s potential? Whether academically or skillfully. We are stuck with the mentally of mediocrity and settlement. We too want nice things and have our likes and dislikes. It is the HUMAN RIGHT as a child to be given the opportunity to develop the potential. Every day, you see children who are blessed with all their acumen taking for granted their physical and mental assets fighting, displaying disgusting behaviours and that is by their choice. Yet you see officials of power publically exhibiting concerns and plans of what can be done to help these children, fair enough. But I ask why isn't Children with disabilities schooling be a major cause for concern too? Why laws cannot be put in place so that all children with disabilities are allowed to develop themselves. I know why, because what benefit would it serve for country if we are catered for right? Change is daunting not so? We are wont be effective nor efficient, right? I will just say you are WRONG.

I believe that none of us should expect society to facilitate us. Rather we have to have to create our own facilities if we want to be something and make a contribution on this earth. I have lived to attest to this, if you want to succeed you have to be able to find alternatives and simply be willing to fight the battle.

We are all born in this earth into different circumstances but it is what we make of these circumstances would determine our contribution to society. We all can be leaders in our own field once we are willing to work hard and accept failure without giving up. Society have to change the old adage of its definition of leadership so more pathways can be opened making our country a lucrative one that has a bigger doorway for more to flourish.

Let me divert context for a bit, our country who was once blessed with so much resources and such beautiful people in all its diversity have been destroyed by who? The very leaders of various calibers, the same leaders who overlook us PWDs. The people who supposed to be "normal" and

flourishing are now fearful and feel like suppressed due to the state of our country.
I say that to say imagine for us who aren’t priority to those in charge. Who are really looking out for us besides the very few who fight daily out of their personal strengths yet impact is so miniscule. Do you ever think about those children or young adults who have a disability to the point they eat through a tube, what about those who cannot talk or barely are in tune with reality? Is anything being done for when their parents are no longer here? Or is it that we just hope that they die first in order to bite the bullet of suffering because no institutions or trained individuals are there to help them carry on with their lives and to live a full life? We really need to think, rethink and think over!...I am frightful for my future you know, I also observe those who are considered being privileged in society are now feeling disenfranchised so where does that leave us PWDs, leave our children and leave our country?

Before I end I want to say to you the kids, you are unique but you are no different. Just like any other child you have the right do as you please and express yourself once it is right. Think about one day you becoming whatever you want from this life and being able to buy anything you want. Think about seeing the world and even ruling your world. You can do it.

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to speak I must say I am indeed grateful. I highly commend you for such initiative. Remember this, **if our rights are provided for, we can in turn provide to society**…Thank you again and God bless!