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Mizanur Rahman: Globally Supporting Those With Disabilities



Mizanur Rahman Kiron, is a disability women's rights activist and founder and president Physically-challenged Development Foundation (PDF). Mizanur is originally from Bangladesh, and is currently residing in Princeton, NJ completing his fellowship with [Community Options, Inc.](#) Read his recent [cover story](#) on the [The Daily Star](#), and his articles; [The Map of the Differently-abled](#) & [Focus on the Ability](#).

I grew up in rural Bangladesh, was the first in my extended family to attend university, and came to Dhaka, the capital, to begin a career as a social entrepreneur with modest resources and limited access to networks. I was also the first person from my village who came to the United States. The journey thus far has been extremely difficult for me, but I remained dedicated to my passions and preserved.

I was born in a Sunni Muslim family and most of us incorporate Islam into our daily lives. We believe in equal human rights, respect others views , and despise terrorism. While seeing that Muslim people in certain corners of the world are suffering, killed or persecuted by themselves or others, and becoming disabled because of the atrocities of war, I believe there is much work to be done to empower humanity. I strongly believe that in garnering voices and cultivating leadership, terrorists will be removed and downed soon, and that Muslims and non-Muslims can live in a world of peace, tolerance, and respect. This requires education, advocacy, and

harnessing leadership potential from both youth and adults.

I was astounded to see the difference between Bangladesh and here in United States. People have respect upon each others' views, with room for discourse and dialogue, and truly care on working towards core values, with an emphasis on cooperation.

I came in the USA in September 12, 2015 as an [Atlas Corps Fellow](#). I am serving here with [Community Options, Inc](#), a nonprofit that provides residential and employment support for individuals with disabilities. I serve as a training and grants specialist, and it is also the 4th largest NGO in New Jersey.

When I first set foot on the premises of Jahangirnagar University campus in 2006, I was not sure if I would be able to pursue my studies there. The dream was there but I had to face the challenge of managing everything on my own in this entirely new environment.

While struggling to continue my studies, I met Barkat, a student from my department. During his training in a sports institution, Barkat lost one of his legs and became disabled for the rest of his life. I began to help him with his studies, and while assisting him, I experienced an epiphany. I got a new vision for my life.

I felt that the campus was too unwelcoming for unfortunate students like him and furthermore there was an unofficial ban on enrolling students with disabilities. I founded my organization, the [Physically-challenged Development Foundation \(PDF\)](#), in 2008 and it is one of the largest youth-led organizations in Bangladesh.

I do not have a disability; hence I had to fight against the social stigma and even with my family to marry someone with one... my wife is the first visually impaired student to be accepted to my university to pursue a higher education. She is a visionary woman, and she has served to be my mentor and even gifted us with a beautiful child. She has been at the forefront of my activism, and our successes are shared.

I have seven years of experience in leading and managing youth-led disability rights organizations. My philosophy is to empower youth and youth with disabilities through; support services, policies advocacy and promoting leadership best practices. My work has already been applauded by many civil society organizations in Bangladesh. I work in partnership with the US Embassy-Dhaka, the International Committee for Red Crescent (ICRC), Asia Foundation Bangladesh and the Department of Youth Development of Bangladesh Government. My organization also jointly works with Transparency International-Bangladesh (TIB), Bangladesh Legal Aid Service Trust (BLAST), BRAC International, and the Center for the Rehabilitation of the Paralyzed (CRP). In 2015, leading "The Daily Star" recognized me as a Young Achiever of Bangladesh. It featured me in a cover story on my philosophy titled "[Mizanur Rahman's Special Mission](#)".

I have worked professionally with CRP and lead the Advocacy & Networking team with its founder Dr. Valerie Ann Taylor, gaining experience with networking and advocating policy on the national and international level. I worked with BRAC, the world's largest organization, in the Advocacy team for drafting and changing policy at the national level.

Let me share one achievement among hundreds of success stories that we have had on the national policy level. I worked closely with other organizations to advocate for the rights of disabled people, and as a result of our efforts, the Bangladeshi Government finally allows them to participate in the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) examinations and also at least one percent of BCS positions are reserved for the physically-challenged from the year 2013.

Simultaneously, I engage myself with other organizations who are dedicated to change the life of individual with disabilities. I am visiting their projects in different stats and meeting with the disability rights activist. Also I am talking with the world leaders in this field from around the world, visiting different universities

including Princeton, Harvard, and MIT, to learn how they are implementing an inclusive learning environment. I am enjoying my journey here by cultivating new networks with different yet like-minded organization which will help me after going back to my country to promote changing the lives of the disabled while encouraging active citizenship.

I will go back Bangladesh after completing my fellowship and course. The enriched knowledge, network and experiences will help me to create a strong pressure group and achieve its goal more effectively. And I will definitely expand my philosophy worldwide to ensure an inclusive society. Within next the 10 years, I want to see my organization become the best platform for Asian youth to learn best practices for policy advocacy and disability rights movement.

Our Mission



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