



# Disability Rights Adviser Encourages Partnerships, Globally and Regionally

Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, All Inclusion and Empowerment

September 19, 2012 - IFES

The United States of America, Indonesia

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As a young adult in Indonesia, Yusdiana contracted polio and was forced to learn how to navigate life, physically, emotionally and mentally in a wheelchair. Now, as an adult, she holds a key position in a disabled person's organization – travelling across Southeast Asia and the United States as its ambassador.

On her most recent trip to the United States, as the disability rights adviser for the Indonesia Disabled People's Association, Yusdiana spoke about the obstacles to political participation facing persons with disabilities. The dialogue fostered by her visit and the ideas for solutions it brought about are of critical importance as 15 percent of the world's population lives with disability – with the figure rising every year.

Yusdiana's first stop in her August trip to the U.S. was at Mobility International USA's Women's Institute for Leadership and Disability (WILD) program. Based in Oregon, the program allows disabled women from around the globe to gather and share experiences and best practices in advocating for the rights of people with disabilities in their respective countries.

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After Oregon, Yusdiana visited Washington, D.C., where she visited colleagues at IFES' headquarters and met with a range of stakeholders in the nation's capital. Her organization, the Indonesia Disabled People's Association, is working in conjunction with three other organizations on developing the General Election Network for Disability Access in Southeast Asia (AGENDA) – an initiative supported by IFES.

Among the dignitaries Yusdiana met were Judith Heumann, special adviser for international disability rights at the U.S. Department of State; Charlotte McClain-Nhlapo, coordinator for disability inclusive development at U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the U.S. Department of State, and additional USAID regional and thematic program officers.

Yusdiana also conducted a brown bag presentation at American University's Institute on Disability and Public Policy (IDPP) and conducted an internal presentation on the AGENDA project for IFES staff. She outlined the progress of the AGENDA network and her experience in advocating for persons with disabilities in Indonesia and Southeast Asia.

Yusdiana said her own experience has shown her the many benefits of participation. In her hometown of Mataram on the island of Lombok (Nusa Tenggara Barat) she was often asked to get involved in disability work. She was reluctant until she attended a meeting on encouraging people from her community to attend the Paralympics. From that point on, she began to reach out to people with disabilities and encourage them to participate.

Her experience with AGENDA has built on that notion of participation – extending it from engaging the community on basic issues like health and education to ensuring people with disabilities actively participate in politics and elections and have a voice in the way they are governed.

AGENDA is an IFES-supported network of disabled person's organizations and election-related civil society organizations working to advance the rights of people with disabilities in electoral and political processes in Southeast Asia. Since its creation in April 2011, the AGENDA network has built an impressive network of disability rights advocates across the region. Partners in Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines have now joined forces with Indonesian organizations to monitor disability access during local and national elections, and advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities across Southeast Asia.

To date, AGENDA partners have carried out five local election observations in Indonesia utilizing specialized training and election monitoring tools focused on the rights of persons with disabilities in elections, and also monitored local commune council elections in Cambodia using techniques piloted and refined in Indonesia. AGENDA has also advocated for the rights of persons with disabilities to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN) Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights as it drafts its new Declaration on Human Rights. Ensuring that ASEAN takes into account the rights of persons with disabilities is critical in the fight for human rights and democracy in the region.

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**IFES** 1850 K Street, NW, 5th Floor, Washington, D.C. 20006 Tel: +1.202.350.6700 | Fax: +1.202.350.6701

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