



Empowered lives.  
Resilient nations.



## PRESS RELEASE

### **New Issue Brief calls for greater inclusion and access to information for people with print disabilities in Asia-Pacific**

**1 December 2017, Wellington** – Ending the lack of equitable access to information and knowledge among persons who are blind, visually impaired or otherwise print disabled is key to realizing an inclusive world for all, says a new Issue Brief for the Asia-Pacific region developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Blind Union – Asia Pacific (WBUAP) and the Electronic Information for Libraries (EIFL).

Released in the run-up to the International Day of Persons with Disabilities on 3 December, the *Asia-Pacific Issue Brief on the Marrakesh Treaty* provides a succinct summary of the complex subject, describes the key benefits and calls on all countries to join the *Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired, or Otherwise Print Disabled*.

The World Blind Union estimates that less than 1 percent of published books in developing countries, and 7 percent in developed countries, are ever made into formats that are accessible to print disabled persons, such as braille, audio, e-books or materials with large print. This situation, often referred to as a 'book famine,' is preventing millions of persons with print disabilities around the world from making the most of human development opportunities, leading to exclusion, social isolation and poverty. Persons with disabilities remain among the poorest of the poor across societies, being left behind from economic, social and cultural progress.

To end the book famine, an international copyright treaty – *the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired, or Otherwise Print Disabled* – was adopted by member states of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), a UN agency, in 2013, which entered into force last year. This is the first copyright treaty with human rights principles at its core. However, only seven countries in the Asia-Pacific region have become part of the Treaty so far.

“The ‘book famine’ all too often excludes persons with print disabilities from access to education, employment, health care, culture or participation in just about any aspect of political, economic and social activities,” said Michiko Tabata, President of WBUAP. “Civil society loses out just as much as print disabled people do from their exclusion. We call upon all countries in the Asia-Pacific to join the Marrakesh Treaty and end the book famine.”

Joining and implementing the Marrakesh Treaty will also significantly contribute to achieving many of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are guided by the principle of ‘leaving no one behind’.

“For too long, people who live with visual impairment and other reading disabilities have lacked sufficient access to published works in the Asia-Pacific region,” said Nadia Rasheed, Team Leader, HIV, Health and Development, UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub. “Expanding the ratification and implementation of the Marrakesh Treaty to more countries in the region is of critical importance to ensure realization of the fundamental right to information and knowledge and to realize a more inclusive world for all.”

The Asia-Pacific region is estimated to have the world’s largest number of persons with blindness (21.4 million) and moderate to severe visual impairment (135 million). A rapid populating ageing and the rise of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes in the region will further increase the number of print disabled persons, heightening the importance of greater access to published works in accessible formats to achieve disability-inclusive and sustainable development.

"Throughout the world, libraries are one of the primary sources of reading materials in accessible formats," said Rima Kupryte, EIFL Director. "EIFL is strongly committed to speedy ratification of the Marrakesh Treaty that creates new opportunities for libraries to vastly improve services to people with print disabilities, thereby improving lives and increasing life-chances."

Download the Issue Brief in PDF and accessible formats including electronic braille, ‘accessible’ Word, plain text HTML, and MP3 audio at: [http://www.asia-pacific.undp.org/content/rbap/en/home/library/democratic\\_governance/hiv\\_aids/issue-brief-for-asia-pacific-on-the-marrakesh-treaty-to-facilitate.html](http://www.asia-pacific.undp.org/content/rbap/en/home/library/democratic_governance/hiv_aids/issue-brief-for-asia-pacific-on-the-marrakesh-treaty-to-facilitate.html)

For more information, please contact:

Neil Jarvis  
Marrakesh Treaty Regional Coordinator for Asia-Pacific  
World Blind Union – Asia Pacific  
[njarvis@blindfoundation.org.nz](mailto:njarvis@blindfoundation.org.nz)

Ian Mungall  
Programme Analyst  
HIV, Health and Development  
UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub  
[ian.mungall@undp.org](mailto:ian.mungall@undp.org)

Heather Fishlock  
External Communications Manager  
Electronic Information for Libraries  
[heather.fishlock@eifl.net](mailto:heather.fishlock@eifl.net)