

The welcome from the Prime Minister, Mr. Bratteli,  
at the opening of the FIMITIC Conference in Oslo  
on 14 June 1972.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

On behalf of the Norwegian Government, it gives me great pleasure to greet all of you attending the FIMITIC Conference and to wish you good luck and success in your work.

The main theme to be dealt with by the Conference concerns vital human problems in modern society. In our policy of creating greater equality among people as a whole, we also see it as an important task to adapt the general conditions so that the disabled and those who are otherwise physically handicapped may have the same opportunities as others. They have the same right to experience that life has a meaning and that each separate individual has the possibility of realizing his or her potentialities.

This is a social spirit which has slowly and gradually come into existence over the last generation. I assume that legislation in many countries records a process of development of such a kind.

In Norway our first legislation concerning assistance for blind and for helplessly disabled people was passed in the 1930s. Its principal aim was to secure the physically handicapped reasonable

means for supporting themselves. With the Disability Pension Act which came into force in 1961, legislation was extended to cover physically handicapped persons from all groups. The Rehabilitation Assistance Act which came into force at the same time supplied the basis for helping the individual patient to reach a level of performance where he would be in a position to provide for himself and his family through work yielding a regular income. In recent years there has been increasing support for the scheme of establishing protected economic undertakings and for other ways of fostering protected employment.

A year ago the existing legislation was modified in such a way that the disabled person became entitled to use technical aids able to improve his capabilities or increase his well-being, even if there was no prospect of his becoming a workable person in the usual sense of the word. Gradually as measures were put into effect to benefit the individual, it became clear that there was much in society as a whole which nevertheless excluded the physically handicapped from the self-expression that other people regard as a natural right. This was the beginning of a painful process of learning, and the physically handicapped had to take over as our teachers. They were particularly well-qualified to discover and draw attention to the obstacles which arise in the event of, for example, a wheelchair patient wanting to participate in ordinary

education, go to the theatre or see a football match.

This aspect of the matter requires a whole new way of thinking on the part of society. We must to a much greater extent give careful thought to how far it is possible to construct the various fittings and arrangements in general use in such a way that they can serve all groups of people in the community. I see this Conference as an important step towards having these problems clearly stated and finding ways of realizing their solution.

It will be demanded of the physically handicapped that they give the planners, architects and engineers the necessary stimulus. There will have to be teamwork, with both sides set on achieving practical results within the framework of the resources which the community has at its disposal. With the greatest interest have I observed the programme which has been prepared for this Conference, and I feel convinced that it will give the participants valuable new ideas and experiences which can be utilized in the further work towards attaining this goal.

I should like to wish the participants in the Conference the very best of luck and to express my hope that all of you will enjoy your time here.