

ABSTRACT

The Harvard Project on Disability seeks \$160,000 from the Harvard China Fund to support its work in China, much of it to be done in collaboration with Renmin University of China.

The Harvard Project on Disability was established in 2004 to undertake research, teaching, academic capacity building, and public service work regarding issues of disability worldwide (there being at least 650 million individuals globally with disabilities). Members of the Project's scholarly team have produced significant cross-disciplinary research on disability, developed innovative courses on disability in a global setting, and provided extensive advice on a pro bono basis to international organizations, governments, foreign universities, and civil society. By way of illustration of their pro bono work, scholars affiliated with the Project were active in the drafting and negotiation of the recently concluded United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which has already been signed by more than 90 nations including China (which played a prominent role in its negotiation).

The Project is headed by Professor William Alford, Vice Dean for the Graduate Program and International Legal Studies, Director of East Asian Legal Studies, and the Henry L. Stimson Professor of Law at Harvard Law School, and Professor Michael Stein, the Cabell Research Professor at William & Mary Law School, a Research Fellow at East Asian Legal Studies, and an international leader in disability studies.

Since its inception, the Project has been involved in China in conducting research, helping develop a field of disability studies there (especially in law), assisting Chinese charged with drafting revisions to the national law on disability, and developing China's first website regarding law and disability. A highlight of this work was a conference held in January 2007 that for the first time drew together Chinese scholars in an array of pertinent disciplines (including law, education, architecture, sociology, and public health) and also engaged scholars from the U.S. and other nations. That conference led to the establishment, at Renmin University, of China's first academic program concerned with disability and the law: the Center for the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Persons with Disabilities.

The Project now seeks Harvard China Fund support to develop further this promising start in what, until recently, has been a much-neglected area. Specifically, we hope to work closely with Dean Wang Liming of Renda's Law School and other colleagues at Renda, Fudan, and the Chinese University of Hong Kong, to undertake a series of projects concerning disability with research, teaching, academic capacity building, and public service dimensions. These focus on legislative development, the social construction of disability in contemporary China, the rise of civic organizations concerned with these issues, and the various remedial paths (through law, politics, and social action) for addressing the many challenges that confront PRC citizens with disabilities (a number that the Chinese government estimates to be more than 80 million but is likely closer to 130 million).

By way of example, we have begun working with the Renmin University Center on comparative employment law and related social welfare issues, and would like with them to convene a joint conference at Renda about access to education for persons with disabilities. Such a conference would also have the benefit of bringing together scholars at CASS, Fudan, Wuhan, Tsinghua, Nanjing, and other institutions as part of our effort to foster the development of disability studies. We have also been asked to continue to offer pro bono advice regarding the revision of China's principal national law on disability and also to be involved in other pertinent projects, including the development of implementing regulations for this law and working with Chinese experts involved in developing a regulatory framework for charitable endeavor in general. And we are in the early stages, with Fudan, of research regarding how disabled citizens understand their status and address their social situation.

Closer to home, we would like to start a regular seminar series at Harvard that might build a community of interested scholars here (disability having been a badly neglected area of academic inquiry or policy work at our University). We also intend to bring scholars from China working on these issues to Harvard to the benefit of all. We plan to develop a major case study on disability in China for a new course at Harvard Law School which would fulfill the School's new international/comparative law requirement. And we intend to create internship and related opportunities here and in China for students from throughout the University.

Support from the Harvard China Fund is needed to ensure that the Harvard Project's broader work on disability in a global setting would have a strong and viable China dimension. Thank you for your consideration of this application.