

# Rahul urged to stand up for the disabled

## Disability rights group submits six-point charter for empowerment

Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI:** A six-point charter of demands seeking empowerment of and various facilities for persons with disabilities has been submitted to Congress general secretary Rahul Gandhi by the Society for Disability and Rehabilitation Studies.

The memorandum, submitted by the honorary president of the society and noted expert on Disability Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Dr. G. N. Karna, raises pressing issues related to empowerment of persons with disabilities.

Among other things it calls for creation of a separate Department of Disability Affairs (by bifurcating the disability

issue from the nodal Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment) and promotion of teaching and research on Disability Studies in various universities and colleges.

It also asks for institution of a Rajiv Gandhi Chair in Disability Studies in Central Universities and strengthening of the constitution of the Office of Chief Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities in keeping with the ethos of disability rights movement as also the UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The disability rights group has also asked for providing and ensuring representation of persons with disabilities in Central and State legislatures, Panchayati Raj Institu-

tions and other statutory bodies, especially with regard to appointment of Vice-Chancellors, Pro-VCs and chairpersons of boards, corporations, commissions and statutory bodies. It also calls for creation or activation of a Disability Division by the All-India Congress Committee.

Speaking about the demands, Dr. Karna said, "Since these issues are very closely related to making the Millennium Development Goals inclusive -- as empowerment of persons with disabilities and their communities around the world has been declared by the United Nations as the focus of activities of the International Year of Disabled Persons 2009 -- it is strongly advocated that these de-

mands be implemented and incorporated into the 11th Five-Year Plan documents.

Dr. Karna said adequate budgetary allocation should also be made accordingly. "This is highly necessary from the standpoint of bringing to the mainstream around 10 per cent of the total population affected by physical, mental or sensory disabilities in some or other ways in a developing country like ours."

However, he said, if such vital issues are neglected in policy circles, this is because of the fact that the disabled are not treated as a vote bank and cosmetically remembered only on the International Day of Disabled Persons.