

Judul : When a handicapped visitor is chased away from a famous mall
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When a handicapped visitor is chased away from a famous mall



People with disabilities watch over the Plenary Meeting at the House of Representatives that passes the Law on People with Disabilities to guarantee the protection and rights of disabled people on March 17, 2016. (Antara: Hafidz Mubarak A.)

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Kornelius Purba (The Jakarta Post)

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After talking with friends who have profound knowledge about the issue of people with disabilities, I decided to share the horrible experience of my wife last week at AEON shopping mall in Jakarta Garden City, East Jakarta. The shopping mall has excellent facilities for people with disabilities. The management of the company has expressed an intention to directly apologize to my wife.

My wife originally opposed my writing plan as she did not want to gain popularity due to her physical condition. She said she was much luckier than many others who could not even afford to buy used wheelchairs. She feels blessed, but I know she was deeply humiliated by the horror she experienced at the mall.

The incident attracted great public attention after I shared the experience on my Facebook account last week. Only after that did the company take the matter into account, meaning that it had not followed up my direct complaint to its customer service immediately.

In fact, the harassment recurred just three days after I filed my report. This article, therefore, is dedicated to handicapped people who are struggling not only for a need for public facilities for people with disability, but also from public ignorance.

According to the 2019 National Social and Economic Survey (Susenas), there are 25.6 million people with disabilities in Indonesia. The government has begun to show it does care by providing infrastructure in public spaces. The Jakarta administration has also made significant progress in addressing their rights.

But we should not only question the government. I have witnessed how physically-fit people are often disrespectful to people in wheelchairs who are queuing for an elevator. Some able-bodied people show no remorse in occupying parking spaces reserved for people with wheelchairs just because they are empty.

This article is not intended to retaliate against the behavior of AEON security guards, who chased away my wife four times in less than two months simply because she rode a mobility scooter in the mall. My wife cannot walk without assistance after a failed backbone surgery 20 years ago. She used to use a wheelchair at home; but two years ago, my children helped us buy a mobility scooter to enable her to move with less assistance. It is quite expensive, at least for me.

The guards of the mall told her she was not welcome there because she could disturb other visitors, apparently because they did not know what the electric scooter was for, but they had to report the case to their superiors or the company management. My wife did not tell me about the first and second humiliation she experienced from the company.

The third incident occurred on the afternoon of April 4. A security guard told my wife the mall was not a playground and she should leave the compound immediately. My wife shoved him her specially designed shoes to convince him that she was not using the vehicle for a joy ride. When the incident happened, I was ordering food in a stall.

We immediately tried to find the guard, but could not. When we asked his colleagues, we were asked to identify him. We reported the case to customer service. They apologized and asked me to make a written report. I refused, because they interrogated us as if they were police. They convinced us the annoying disturbance would never happen



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But only three days later, the humiliation recurred. "I have told you to never come here again, and you still come?" the guard scolded my wife in front of a skin-care center. I was outraged. Then he contacted his boss and was told that a mobility scooter was allowed in the mall. He then let us go without saying anything. In the previous incident, a guard even displayed his suspicion about the origin of the scooter.

I also do not intend to discredit the Japanese company that manages the business, because I have always regarded the mall as one of the most generous shopping centers for handicapped people. They provide at least four special parking lots for the unfortunate people. Special toilets are available on all floors.

Several years ago, I wrote about Plaza Senayan, also owned by a Japanese company, as the most empathetic mall in Jakarta for providing parking spaces and toilets for disabled people.

The problem is with the people who operate the business. The perfect facility will mean nothing when it is handled by people who have little knowledge about the issue and when the company owner does not train the staff well or continuously monitor how they implement the guidelines.

The government has shown its seriousness to help disadvantaged people. In 2011, the House of Representatives ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In 2016, the House also endorsed legislation on persons with disabilities or Law No. 8/2016.

In February, Jakarta Deputy Governor Ahmad Riza Patria announced the city government's plan to revise the bylaw on handicapped people. He pointed out six main priorities including protecting the rights of people with disabilities, providing infrastructure, ensuring a protective and regulating public role and imposing sanctions for any violations of the bylaws.

In Oct. 2020, President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo signed Government Regulation No. 60/2020, which obliges regional governments to provide a disability service unit (ULD) on manpower to support the employment of people with disabilities. Last year, the government established the National Commission on Disability (Komnas Disabilitas).

The public must also be educated. We need to learn from the attitude of Indonesians of Chinese origin. They show much stronger affection and empathy for people with disability. They smile and offer help. And it quite often happens that they give practical advice or recommendations. I made this conclusion after years of experience.

Do not compare us with much more advanced countries such as the European Union members. We must be realistic. Indonesia is still in the initial phase to reach the ideal stage. But Indonesian people also need to learn to be more empathetic with those who are not as perfect as them, who they encounter in their daily life.

The writer is a senior editor at The Jakarta Post.