

# INTERNATIONAL REHABILITATION REVIEW

December 2007 • Vol. 56, No. 1

**SPECIAL EDITION**

**THIS ISSUE**

**The Convention  
on the Rights  
of Persons with  
Disabilities**



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INTERNATIONAL REHABILITATION  
**REVIEW**

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## Foreword

RI is very pleased to launch this Special Edition of our re-designed magazine, *International Rehabilitation Review (IRR)*, with a focus on promoting the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

For many years, the *IRR* has been a valuable resource to facilitate the exchange of information and ideas in the disability field, highlighting the advocacy efforts and projects of RI, our members and partners, and drawing attention to a broad range of disability-related issues.

An impressive range of people with disabilities, advocates and experts in the human rights and disability sectors have contributed to this *IRR* issue as part of the RI Global Advocacy Campaign on the UN Convention.

I invite you to read and discuss this *IRR Special Edition* with a view to continuing the dialogue with RI on how we can work together to achieve the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities worldwide.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Fox', written in a cursive style.

Michael Fox

*RI President*

# The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: A Benchmark for Action

BY AMBASSADOR DON MACKAY

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 13 December 2006, was the first new comprehensive human rights treaty for 16 years, and the first of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It was the end of a negotiation which was begun by the United Nations in 2001. For the international disability community, including RI, it had been a much longer process.

Disability organizations had long been pressing for a convention dealing specifically with the rights of persons with disabilities. Initially, many governments, even those traditionally in the vanguard of human rights protection, had reservations about the need to negotiate a major new human rights instrument. They were concerned about the large resources required for such a negotiation, and argued that there was in fact no need for a new convention, because the existing human rights instruments applied to persons with disabilities, in just the same way that they do to everyone else.

In theory this argument was correct, but unfortunately practice had proved rather different. Although the existing human rights instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (which is the found-

ing human rights document), the International Covenant on Civil and Political rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights apply to everyone, in practice these rights have not been universally applied to all people. Some groups have tended to be a lesser priority for governments for enforcement of their rights over the years. Very early on, therefore, it was recognized that some groups of people who suffer from discrimination need to have their own specific conventions to spell out in more detail the rights that apply to those groups. Examples are the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination.

Until very recently, persons with disabilities were left out of that process. However, as a result of the tenacious and persuasive lobbying by NGOs and disability organizations, and the advocacy of some governments, the tide gradually turned in favor of a new convention. As the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, told the UN Committee negotiating the new Convention, on 27 January 2006, “There is no doubt that the existing human rights system was



Persons with disabilities have been characterized by the United Nations as “the world’s largest minority,” and it is estimated that around ten per cent of the world’s population, or 650 million people, live with a disability.



*Ambassador Luis Gallegos of Ecuador (left), the first Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and Ambassador Don MacKay of New Zealand, who served as Chair during the last sessions of the negotiations.*

meant to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities. There is also no doubt that the existing standards and mechanisms have in fact, failed to provide adequate protection in the specific case of persons with disabilities. It is clearly time for the United Nations to remedy this shortcoming.”

By this time, in their 2005 World Summit Outcome Document, world leaders had specifically recognized the need to finalize a convention on the rights of persons with disabilities.

Certainly, the statistics compiled by the United Nations and its specialized agencies on the situation of persons with disabilities worldwide left no doubt that specific action needed to be taken. Persons with disabilities have been characterized by the United Nations as “the world’s largest minority,” and it is estimated that around ten per cent of the world’s population, or 650 million people, live with a disability.

The failure of existing human rights instruments to fully ensure the human rights of persons with disabilities does not mean that Governments have deliberately avoided their obligations. However, many of the obligations under these exist-

ing instruments are set out in quite a broad way, which can leave grey areas for their practical implementation for particular groups such as persons with disabilities. Often, too, the enjoyment of those rights by persons with disabilities may require some adaptation by States to accommodate the disability in question.

To give just a couple of practical examples. Persons who are blind have just the same right to vote as everyone else, but if they are not permitted assistance in the voting booth, from someone they trust, that right may not amount to much in practice. Persons in wheelchairs have just the same freedom of movement as anyone else, but if public buildings are not accessible to them, that

right is also very limited. And so one could go on. Unfortunately, too, persons with disabilities can find themselves subject to more direct discrimination, and also to negative attitudes and stereotyping. These are amongst the many issues dealt with in the new Convention.

Certainly, those who participated in these negotiations were left in no doubt as to why this convention is needed. The candid contributions of civil society, including the very active and influential role played by RI, were invaluable in opening our eyes to the realities of the world for persons with disabilities, and in reaffirming why our task was so crucial.

In fact, the active participation of civil society was at an unprecedented level for such a negotiation, with over 400 representatives pre-registered at some of the later meetings. The UN Expert Working Group that was initially given the task of preparing a negotiating draft for the Convention, in January 2004, comprised government representatives and representatives of civil society (including RI), participating equally together and without distinction. It was that Working Group’s product, which so emphatically reflected the

**What, then, does the Convention do? In essence it elaborates in considerable detail the rights of persons with disabilities under international law and sets out a code of implementation for governments.**

real-life experiences of persons with disabilities, which became the basis for the eventual Convention. It truly enshrined the slogan of the international disability movement, “nothing about us without us.”

This commitment was also reflected in the negotiating process as a whole, resulting in what the Secretary-General of the United Nations described (on the Convention’s adoption), as “the most rapidly negotiated human rights treaty in the history of international law; and the first to emerge from lobbying conducted extensively through the Internet.”

What, then, does the Convention do? In essence it elaborates in considerable detail the rights of persons with disabilities under international law and sets out a code of implementation for governments. It is a practically focused convention, because it was so closely informed by the experiences of persons with disabilities worldwide, as represented by their organizations such as RI. They clearly articulated the challenges, difficulties and requirements of persons with disabilities in their interaction with society at large, and it is those areas – and they are myriad – on which the Convention focuses. It will be the benchmark for future standards and action.

This is a lengthy convention, with over thirty substantive articles, many of them quite long, together with other articles which establish monitoring mechanisms at both the national and international levels. For international monitoring there will be a Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, to receive and consider periodic reports from

States Parties along similar lines to those under other human rights treaties. The Committee will also receive individual communications alleging violations of the Convention, in respect of those States which accept its jurisdiction to do so under an Optional Protocol to the Convention.

The Convention spans a wide range of real-life issues in considerable detail, including accessibility, personal mobility, health, education, employment, habilitation and rehabilitation, participation in political life, equality and non-discrimination. It marks a “paradigm shift” from thinking about disability as a social welfare matter to dealing with it as a human rights issue, which acknowledges that societal barriers and prejudices are themselves disabling.

There are several recurring themes throughout the Convention. One is inclusiveness in the community, which is a central element. Too often, persons with disabilities have been treated separately – and have been separated off – from other parts of the community. Too often there has been an automatic fallback on institutionalization. This is not normally in the best interests of the person concerned, nor is it usually in the best interests of the community as a whole.

A second theme, closely related to the first, is bringing about a change in attitudes and getting rid of stereotyping. The Convention sets out various actions to be taken by States in this respect. Attitudes need to change, and the Convention leads the way in this.

A third theme – and the Convention contains many practical mea-

asures – is accessibility. This can be physical accessibility to buildings, or it can be accessibility in other ways, for example providing signage in Braille, and providing accessible information and communication technologies, including through universal design from which we will all benefit. The Convention also deals with related issues such as ensuring personal mobility, where that is a problem, and facilitating independent living.

Consistent with the theme of accessibility, the text of the Convention and of the Optional Protocol is specifically required to be made available in accessible formats. To help make it more usable and accessible, the individual articles have titles as well as numbers, in a departure from recent practice in human rights instruments.

Effective implementation will now be the key. That will require effective and coordinated action by disability organizations, which have worked so well in the negotiations. It will require early action by governments to bring the Convention into force. We should then see in practice, the benefits of this new international human rights Convention, in which RI has played such a commendable role. ■

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*Ambassador Don MacKay is the Permanent Representative of New Zealand to the United Nations in Geneva, and served as Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities for the final two years of negotiations.*



*One day after the negotiations on the UN Convention were completed in August 2006, RI and its member the US International Council on Disability (USICD) held an interactive seminar on implementation of the Convention, with over 300 participants from the global disability community, governments and UN agencies.*

## RI and the Convention: A Focus on Translating the Convention to Action

BY TOMAS LAGERWALL

Few people are aware of RI's long history of promoting disability rights dating back to the Crippled Child's Bill of Rights in 1931, considered to be among the first international documents on disability rights. While the language used at that time is no longer the norm, this document on the rights of children with disabilities preceded the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948.

Although the organization had strong support from medical doctors at its early stages, RI has come a long way from the medical approach to disability and now the organization embraces the rights-based model. Indeed, the 1999 RI Charter for the New Millennium called on UN Member States to support the development of a Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities as a key strategy. The document was presented to more than 100 heads of

states and governments. RI, together with other disability organizations, also spearheaded the 2000 Beijing Declaration.

International disability organizations welcomed the proposal by Mexico in 2001 to launch negotiations toward a disability rights convention. RI, as the only New York-based international disability organization, closely followed and participated in the discussions on this issue in the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly (which deals with human rights) from October to December 2001.

### RI'S ROLE IN THE AD HOC COMMITTEE

Several organizations and individuals can point to specific articles to which they contributed during the Ad Hoc Committee meetings. In the case of RI, Article 26 on Habilitation and Rehabilitation and Article

9 on Accessibility were some articles where RI played a leading role in the disability community's input. In later stages of the negotiations, RI was also actively engaged in the articles on legal capacity (Article 12) and international monitoring (Articles 34-40), among others. As a cross-disability organization, RI also advocated that the needs and rights of ALL persons with disabilities, including people with chronic illnesses and other less visible diseases, should be taken into consideration.

As an organization comprised of diverse members – disabled peoples' organizations, service providers, government agencies and others – RI and its members often served as "bridge-builders" in the negotiations, initiating contacts and facilitating common understanding and compromises. This mediation role is one of RI's most important contributions to the Convention process.

## SIGNING AND RATIFICATION

The overwhelming support for the CRPD from over 100 governments in its first six months represents the strong political commitment of States to follow through with their promises to persons with disabilities. In fact, this genuine interest in the Convention by heads of state and other senior political officials was palpable during the UN Treaty Event at UN headquarters in late September, 2007.

The high number of countries signing the Convention in such a short time creates high expectations that this Convention will have a real impact on the lives of millions of persons with disabilities all over the world. It is up to all of us, however, to ensure that these expectations are translated into a reality.

The disability community, together with governments and international and regional organizations, have to keep up the momentum to ensure that governments not only sign and ratify the Convention, but even more important, that all stakeholders take the steps needed to implement the Convention.

### RI's Focus

Soon after the Convention was open for signature, RI launched its global advocacy campaign. This campaign aims to:

- provide information about the Convention in accessible formats
- promote signature, ratification and implementation of the CRPD, without reservations
- build the capacity of disability advocates, politicians, law-makers, lawyers, judges and decision-makers in disability

rights and implementation of the Convention.

- assist DPOs in select Latin American countries with analyzing their existing legislation and recommending possible adjustments to comply with the Convention

Based on the interest in the research and training components of this campaign – which RI is conducting together with DPOs in Mexico, Costa Rica and Ecuador and in collaboration with lawyers at the NY-based law firm Weil, Gotshal & Manges and local law firms in the three countries on a pro bono basis – RI plans to replicate this unique public-partnership model in other countries and regions. An important group for our next phase of training will be judges, who will play a decisive role in how the CRPD is interpreted in each country.

As the CRPD places high responsibilities on governments, the most difficult work starts after the ratifications, when the noble principles will have to be put into action. Many questions will be raised such as:

- How can we ensure inclusive education for persons with different kinds of disabilities?
- How can we facilitate the employment of persons with disabilities?
- How can we provide good habilitation and rehabilitation for millions of people, in particular those living in areas with limited resources?
- How can old historic buildings and societies be made accessible?
- How can new technologies be of benefit and not a barrier to people with disabilities?

- How can we ensure the ability of people with disabilities to exercise their rights, particularly people who society, for generations, has declared unable to take care of themselves?

Given the breadth and depth of expertise within its 1000-member network, RI has proven experience in finding solutions to these questions. Executive Committee members are not only disability advocates, but also have a professional background in law, rehabilitation, medicine, architecture, and other disciplines. RI's experts plan to work with other key actors — DPOs, governments, national human rights institutes, service providers — to develop action plans, programs and policies, particularly at the local level (e.g. municipality and village). This will require training, information material, and sharing examples of good practice. RI will also promote the gathering of statistics and indicators so that it will be possible to measure the impact of the Convention. At its Governing Assembly meeting in Tunisia in October 2007, RI adopted a Strategic Plan underscoring RI's commitment to implementing the Convention.

RI looks forward to the collaboration and partnerships that will be forged as we all endeavor to create a world of equality as envisioned by the Convention. Despite the difficult questions raised in implementing rights, together, we can find the answers to improving the quality of life of persons with disabilities worldwide. ■

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*Tomas Lagerwall is Secretary General of RI.*

# “Nothing About Us Without Us”: IDA’s Unique Role in Promoting the CRPD

BY LEX GRANDIA

As an alliance of eight global democratic organizations of people with disabilities, the International Disability Alliance (IDA) occupies a unique position in the disability community. IDA aims to jointly represent people with disabilities at the international level, and to strengthen member organizations and disabled peoples’ organizations (DPOs) to collaborate and participate more actively at the international, regional, national and local levels. In addition, IDA strives to identify and develop inclusive positions and joint strategies on key

disability-related issues and to inform UN bodies and relevant agencies. IDA offers the benefit of expertise that comes from sustained work in the field of disability and human rights, and from the lived experience of persons with disabilities that gives IDA a representative mandate.

With the support of the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida), IDA’s primary objectives have been to focus on the promotion of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and to build the capacity of DPOs in the Global South. To achieve

these dual goals, IDA members were instrumental in forming the International Disability Caucus (IDC) approximately five years ago in order to present a unified voice of the international disability community at the CRPD negotiations. Communication in the IDC was primarily done through email, enabling organizations at the local and national level in the South to participate. Throughout the Convention process, several IDA members helped lead the IDC by serving on the IDC Steering Committee. The IDC chose two representatives — then IDA Chair Gidion Mandesi (from RI) and Venus Ilagan of Disabled Peoples’ International (DPI) — as the speakers from civil society at the CRPD signing ceremony at UN Headquarters in New York in March 2007.

Now that the Convention is open for signature and ratification, IDA members have been engaging in joint advocacy efforts to promote the CRPD at the national and international levels, in addition to activities carried out by IDA member organizations individually. IDA recognizes the necessity of ensuring that DPOs continue to have input into initiatives to promote and implement the Convention. At the national level, IDA has sent letters to governments to urge signature and ratification of the CRPD without reservations or



*The International Disability Alliance (IDA) elects its Chair from among its eight members – Lex Grandia (left) of the International Federation of the DeafBlind is the current Chair and Gidion Mandesi of RI served as Chair from June 2006 to June 2007.*

declarations. At the international level, IDA members have sent letters and have had face-to-face meetings with representatives from the UN and their agencies. For example, IDA has met with the UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs on an annual basis. IDA also strives to strengthen its relationships with other UN-affiliated agencies, such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), UNICEF, and with the World Bank, among others, to ensure that disability is mainstreamed into the policies of each of these organizations.

IDA members met in Geneva in September, 2007, in conjunction with meetings with representatives from the UN and its agencies. Since the IDA meetings overlapped with the Sixth Session of the Human Rights Council (HRC), IDA held a side event to recommend that disability issues be placed back on the agenda of the HRC. IDA also met with the World Health Organization (WHO) Director General Margaret Chan and participated in a partners meeting with the WHO Disability and Rehabilitation (DAR) team. IDA urged the WHO to treat disability as a human rights issue, rather than as a medical issue, in line with the paradigm shift to a human rights approach to disability embodied by the Convention. It was also stressed that further input from DPOs is needed, in addition to the work already done by IDA representatives in WHO working groups on the World Report on Disability and the Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) guidelines. IDA also met with representatives from the UNESCO Flagship on Education

## The international disability community must continue the spirit of cooperation during the CRPD drafting process that led to an unprecedented level of NGO participation in UN treaty negotiations.

For All (EFA): Towards Inclusive Education for Persons with Disabilities, primarily to give input on an upcoming EFA publication and to explore ways to collaborate together in the future.

IDA has also been working to build the capacity of disability organizations in the Global South. In May 2007, IDA organized a workshop in Panama just after a regional meeting of persons with disabilities in Latin America, who are forming a promising regional structure. That seminar focused on the Convention, human rights and the societal inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities in Latin America. Other seminars are being planned for the Asia-Pacific region in 2008, and a second seminar in Africa in

2009, building on a workshop held in Tanzania in 2005. IDA has also supported the participation of at least one IDA representative from the South at all of its meetings, to ensure that IDA continues to have a South focus.

Looking ahead, the international disability community must continue the spirit of cooperation during the CRPD drafting process that led to an unprecedented level of NGO participation in UN treaty negotiations. IDA is also working very intensively to revise its membership criteria to include regional umbrella organizations. Some regional organizations have a strong and inclusive network already, and will most likely become IDA members within the near future. For others, IDA is seeking ways to support capacity building and increase the inclusion of local and national organizations representing persons with all types of disabilities.

Now that the Convention is a reality, the disability community is needed more than ever to urge countries to sign, ratify and implement the treaty. The challenge will be to foster a community of NGOs that is as inclusive as possible, while ensuring that the voices of persons with all types disabilities are heard at the forefront, exemplifying the motto: "Nothing About Us Without Us." ■

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*Lex Grandia is the current Chair of the International Disability Alliance (IDA) and President of the World Federation of the DeafBlind (WFDB).*

# A Unified Disability Community: The Key to Effective Implementation of the Convention

BY MARIA VERONICA REINA AND STEFAN TROMEL

Disabled Peoples' Organizations (DPOs) had an unprecedented and significant participation in the process of drafting the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Their contributions were consolidated under the umbrella of the International Disability Caucus (IDC) and well-regarded by many stakeholders, including international agencies and governmental officials. Although their achievement is palpable in the numerous initial signatures of the CRPD, various challenges may compromise the effectiveness of future advocacy efforts towards Convention implementation. Sustained DPO unity and broader support from governmental and intergovernmental counterparts are necessary to ensure the success of this global effort to improve the lives of persons with disabilities.

## GROUNDBREAKING ADVOCACY

Through its Resolution A/56/168 establishing the Ad Hoc Committee (AHC) on what was initially called the "Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities", the UN General Assembly invited non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to contribute to the work entrusted to the Com-



*Members of the disability community participated actively in the negotiations toward the CRPD.*

mittee.<sup>1</sup> Remarkably NGOs, particularly DPOs, not only participated in this process but played an exceptional role by providing essential language for the CRPD and gaining access to closed sessions of the Committee, traditionally not open to civil society.

The unprecedented involvement of DPOs in crafting the CRPD can be greatly attributed to their good coordination and mutual cooperation. Since the 1<sup>st</sup> session of the AHC in August 2002, DPOs had organized into a caucus with the intention of developing a common strategy to ensure that the views of people with disabilities would be taken into account in all stages of the

negotiation process. The IDC was recognized as the representative voice of persons with disabilities within the framework of the Ad Hoc Committee, successfully connecting about 80 global, regional and national DPOs and allied NGOs including all of the different disability groups from all regions of the world. The eight global disability organizations forming the International Disability Alliance (IDA) were the core group of the IDC. Legitimized by its broad constituency, DPO leadership and consensual agenda, IDC's advocacy included a broad range of tactics, from developing an alternative Draft Convention to making a unified intervention on each issue during the plenary sessions. The IDC's work extended beyond the limits of the AHC schedule, functioning actively

<sup>1</sup> United Nations, GA 56/168 <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/disA56168e1.htm> (Accessed 4 September 2007)

between sessions mostly via electronic means.

### “NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US”

This was the campaign slogan of the IDC during the CRPD negotiation process. Disability organizations thus clearly indicated that the times had passed, when disability policies were designed without the involvement of persons with disabilities through their representative organizations.

Thanks to the hard work of IDC and its members, Member States gradually realized that, although the IDC was not a formal partner in the negotiation process, to adopt a text without the support of the IDC would not be “politically” possible. There can be no doubt that the active participation of the IDC meant not only that the Convention was adopted in record time, but also that the Convention text strongly reflects the demands of the world-wide disability community.

### A RIGHT, BUT ALSO A CHALLENGE

These demands made by disability organizations, which were already reflected in Rule 18 of the UN Standard Rules, also meant a huge challenge to the diverse disability organizations: the challenge of being able to speak with one voice. Considering that the IDC was comprised of impairment-specific disability organizations and cross-disability organizations as well as international, regional and national organizations, each with different missions and constituencies, it was an amazing achievement that the IDC took a united position throughout the negotiations. All organizations involved in the establishment and work of the

IDC know that consensus was not always easy to achieve, but the effort was definitely worthwhile. The consensus proposals were always better than any proposal which had been prepared by an individual disability organization. This teaches us as disability organizations a clear lesson for the future.

### DPOs AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION

Article 4 of the new Convention is very clear about the need to closely consult and actively involve representative disability organizations in the implementation process at the national level. This requires the establishment of national umbrella organizations of persons with disabilities, where they do not already exist.

While the challenge of unity lies in the hands of disability organizations, it will also be a test of how Governments involve disability organizations in the national processes in a meaningful way. Governments have an opportunity to support the establishment of strong national umbrella organizations; provide basic funding for advocacy work by representative disability organizations, especially by umbrella organizations; and include representative disability organizations in all relevant decision making processes. It will therefore be crucial that DPOs and allied NGOs monitor how genuinely Governments engage disability organizations in the implementation process.

Furthermore, the United Nations should maintain the high standard achieved during the negotiation process, once the follow-up mechanisms are established. Thus, it is vital that

disability organizations are closely involved in the first (and future) Conference of States Parties, as well as in the proceedings of the treaty monitoring body. As done during the CRPD negotiation process, it will be very important that the UN provides a clear role to the IDC (or its successor) and that, as much as possible, funding is provided for the participation of disability organizations from developing countries. Moreover, the UN and other public and private donors should contribute to the strengthening and the capacity building of disability organizations, as this will be the best investment for the future.

Implementation will not be an easy task and a meaningful and active involvement of disability organizations – together with governments and international organizations – is essential to creating a better world for persons with disabilities and for the whole society. Indeed, the organizations representing this 10% of the population must play a leading role in this process. A renewed commitment to the participatory values sustained in the AHC process is critical if the Convention is to be successful in meeting the goal of inclusion for all. ■

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*Maria Veronica Reina is Director of International Programs at the Burton Blatt Institute of Syracuse University. Stefan Trommel is in the International Relations Section of Fundacion ONCE in Spain.*

# Promoting the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: The Role of DESA

BY SHA ZUKANG

The adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities marks an unprecedented opportunity for the United Nations to engage in activities that promote the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) played an instrumental role during the Convention negotiation process, and continues to provide active support to countries, as they implement effective programs and policies that are in accordance with the letter and spirit of the Convention.

DESA works on a wide range of economic, social and environmental issues, with the core mission of promoting “development for all”. DESA and its predecessor departments in the UN Secretariat have played a crucial, behind-the-scenes role in putting development issues at the centre of global deliberations and helping governments to forge a shared vision of development, based on internationally agreed goals. The Department today mobilizes and provides practical support to help translate these commitments into ac-



*Thomas Schindlmayr (left) of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs briefs correspondents on the conclusion of the Convention negotiations, at UN Headquarters in New York.*

tion, through its four main functions: research and analysis, and support to the global statistical system; normative and policy support to the UN’s intergovernmental processes; technical cooperation activities to support country-level implementation; and fostering collaboration and partnerships within the UN system and with civil society and the private sector.

The significance of effective international cooperation in achieving an inclusive society is highlighted in the Convention, which states that signatories recognize the importance of international cooperation and its promotion, and will undertake appropriate and effective measures in this regard. Such measures should ensure that international cooperation, including international development programs, is inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities.

Here I wish to emphasize the importance of mainstreaming disability issues into the wider development agenda. Similar to the recognition of gender and HIV/AIDS as cross-cutting themes in development activities, disability issues need to be treated across all sectors.

Committed efforts are required to support and promote inclusive and accessible environments. Such support includes awareness-raising activities, capacity-building of organizations of persons with disabilities, the formulation of inclusive policy and management systems, and support to the UN system in implementing the Convention.

The Convention is a unique instrument. It incorporates both a human rights perspective, and a social development perspective. It offers a great opportunity for human rights and development professionals, both within international organizations and within civil society, to engage in mutual programming to achieve a common goal. To illustrate this, DESA and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) have agreed that the implementation of the Convention should benefit from the respective expertise of each organization. To this end, it has thus foreseen that the Conference of States Parties will be serviced in New York by DESA, while the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities will be serviced in Geneva by OHCHR.

I look forward to working collaboratively with all partners in efforts to improve the lives of the more than 650 million persons with disabilities. ■

*Sha Zukang is the UN Under-Secretary General for Economic and Social Affairs.*

# The Role of OHCHR in Promoting the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

BY LOUISE ARBOUR

The adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in December 2006 marked an important turning point for the enjoyment of human rights of persons with disabilities. It also marked a turning point for the work of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and for UN human rights work more generally. Once a neglected area on the human rights agenda, the Convention now sets out a comprehensive road map for the way forward. There is much to be done and I see the coming years as an exciting challenge.

As the agency charged with the promotion and protection of human rights within the UN, my Office has an important role in helping States, civil society and national human rights institutions implement the Convention. Together with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Office acts as the Secretariat for the Convention. Supporting the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities — to be established once the Convention comes into force — will be an important aspect of this work. Once established, the Office will have the role of assisting Committee experts in their work, monitoring country

implementation and hearing complaints of human rights violations from individuals. This work goes beyond ensuring that the Committee runs smoothly and also includes assisting States in implementing the Committee's recommendations to governments on how to improve their implementation of the Convention.

Yet I see the Office's work going beyond the servicing of the new Committee. Our work on the new Convention takes place within the wider framework of the Plan of Action I developed for the Office in 2005. As a result, one of the Office's priorities is to engage countries at the national and local level so that the Convention reaches the people who matter — persons with disabilities. Through the human rights field presence in almost 40 different countries, the Office is seeking to promote ratification of the Convention by holding expert seminars, information and ratification campaigns, briefings and other awareness raising activities. In some cases, the Office has gone beyond a focus on ratification, to begin work on monitoring and in assisting in the review of legislation. Since the adoption of the Convention, we have been working with Governments and

civil society in Afghanistan, Angola, Colombia, Kyrgyzstan, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, the Russian Federation, South Africa and Uganda. Our regional offices in four continents are also a way of reaching several countries or a whole region at once.

Uganda provides a good example of our country work. OHCHR Uganda is undertaking a regional research project on the situation of the rights of persons with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities. In line with the Convention, the research approaches the situation of persons with disabilities holistically, considering issues of equality, participation and recognition before the law as well as addressing gaps in entitlements, with particular reference to health services and treatment. The Uganda Office is also supporting the analysis of disability legislation and has held an awareness-raising seminar on the Convention with the Ugandan Human Rights Commissioner for members of local governments, the judiciary, civil society and representatives of persons with disabilities. The Uganda Office is building partnerships with representatives of persons with disabilities in institutions and national DPOs with a view to working together more



*Louise Arbour (right), High Commissioner for Human Rights; Yannis Vardakastanis (center) from the International Disability Caucus, and Lenin Moreno, Vice President of Ecuador, address questions from journalists following the opening for signature of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on March 30, 2007, at UN Headquarters in New York.*

closely in the future.

Back at Headquarters, OHCHR also has a role in providing information on the Convention and how it is to be implemented. In October, OHCHR, together with the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, published a Handbook for Parliamentarians on the Convention. I believe this provides an excellent means of reaching out to parliamentarians to raise awareness about the Convention so that laws are reformed and programs introduced that lead to real change for persons with disabilities and the dismantling of environmental barriers and attitudes in society that are so much the cause of disability. In 2008, we are planning a similar handbook on national monitoring and hopefully other publications and fact sheets on specific areas in the Convention such as legal capacity and supported decision-making.

I am also aware that for our work on the Convention to be effective,

we have to build effective partnerships with civil society and with other inter-governmental agencies. To achieve this, the Office is trying to strengthen its partnerships with civil society, and in particular disabled persons' organizations. I realize that many DPOs are not familiar with the terrain of the UN human rights system and so we are revising our handbook for civil society "Working with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights" and have sent out a questionnaire to DPOs so that the Office NGO database has comprehensive coverage. We are also helping with training initiatives and in providing a framework for partnerships between DPOs and the UN. In this spirit, the Deputy High Commissioner recently addressed the DPI World Assembly in Korea on the issue "Partnership of the United Nations and Disabled Persons' Organizations for Disability and Human Rights". The OHCHR Advisor on Human Rights and Disability also participated in

the RI Regional Conference, held in Tunisia in October.

Finally, while much of the current focus has been in supporting the next phase of the Convention's existence, OHCHR also has a role in mainstreaming human rights and disability throughout the whole human rights program. While specific projects on human rights and disability will always be necessary, it is equally important to ensure that human rights practitioners include a disability perspective in all of their work. Last year, the Office hosted a meeting to support the work of the UN expert — known as a Special Rapporteur — on the right to education, Mr. Vernor Muñoz, to help him develop his work on inclusive education and the rights of persons with disabilities. In December this year, the Office is holding an expert seminar to support the UN Special Rapporteur on the question of torture, Professor Manfred Novak, to assist him in expanding his work on torture to also include the protection of persons with disabilities.

These are still early days. In many ways, we are still enjoying the success of the adoption of the Convention. However, I firmly believe that now is the time to continue the momentum as we move towards the phase of implementation. Through partnerships we can work together in this endeavour. ■

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*Louise Arbour is the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the principal UN official responsible for UN's human rights activities.*

# The UN Disability Rights Convention: Moving Children with Disabilities Center Stage

BY ANN M. VENEMAN

“Let there be no more barriers; (...) above all, awareness must be raised in all levels of society so that children and young people with disabilities may have the opportunity to make a difference in the world.” This was a message from a Nicaraguan youth, Mauricio, to delegates at the Disability Rights Convention’s signature ceremony in March 2007. Mauricio was born with cerebral palsy. As he spoke at the United Nations, what mattered was not his disability, but his ability to address an audience of international leaders with so much passion and wisdom.

Children with disabilities continue to be over-represented among those who make their way through life impoverished, deprived of family care, without access to school, discriminated against, and vulnerable. They are often ignored by decision makers, economists, service providers, and the media, and have largely remained invisible on international and national policy agendas.

Data collection and detection systems are often poor and children with disabilities are frequently hidden from the community because of stigma and shame.

## FROM INVISIBLE TO VISIBLE

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which was



Credit: UN Photo/Filgueiras

*Armen Martirosian, Permanent Representative of Armenia to the United Nations, signs the new United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, with Voices of Youth delegate Ani Hovahannisyian (right) looking on, in New York.*

opened for signature at the United Nations Assembly Headquarters in New York on 30 March 2007 can help bring children with disabilities out of the shadows.

The Convention recognizes that societies must adapt to the needs of people with disabilities so they can achieve their rights — and not the opposite. It provides an authoritative model for governments to use in shaping national laws and policies in the area of disability. And it creates effective mechanisms for monitoring progress against the benchmarks it sets.

Children with disabilities have a prominent place in the Convention.

They are recognized as a distinct constituency, deserving special attention due to the particular vulnerabilities they face as a result of their youth. To strengthen the protection of their rights, the Convention calls for a range of explicit measures, such as the provision of government support and services to families raising a child with a disability, to reduce the likelihood of abandonment, concealment and segregation.

The attention the new Convention gives to children with disabilities is significant. It will increase their visibility, such as in State Parties’ reports to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

that will have to address progress in relation to a broad range of rights - from participation and life in a family to access to education.

#### AN AGENDA FOR CHANGE

The Disability Rights Convention creates opportunities that can make a lasting difference in the lives of children with disabilities. If these opportunities are to be realized, people must be informed about the Convention and the responsibilities it imposes on its signatories. As a young woman from Somalia put it: *“Let this all not end up on paper (...) Let disabled people know their rights*

*(...) so that they can fight for them.”<sup>1</sup>*

Key allies in the effort to spread the word about the Convention will be disabled peoples’ organizations, child rights organizations, parent associations and children with disabilities themselves. These groups can use the Convention to advocate for changes in national policy and legislation that will enable children with disabilities to have access to opportunities available to other children.

Renewed energy must also be focused on providing technical as-

<sup>1</sup> A commentary posted by Zuhur from Somalia on Voices of Youth, on the occasion of the adoption of the Disability Convention in December 2006.

**[Children] are often ignored by decision makers, economists, service providers, and the media, and have largely remained invisible on international and national policy agendas.**

“In our city, there aren’t any conveniences for people with disabilities and every day I have to overcome many difficulties to move around, go to school and communicate with my friends.

When I was 7 months old, I got ill with poliomyelitis. Until I was 5 years old, I wasn’t even able to stand: After the surgery, with the help of a corset, orthosis and other support equipments, I got a chance to walk, and, thanks to the efforts of my mother, soon I was able to go to school together with my friends and peers.

This year I entered State Engineering University of Armenia and I want to receive a post graduate education as well. Of course, the campuses of the University are not accessible for people who have difficulties; there are no elevators, there isn’t accessible public transport that I can use to get to the University. Despite these difficulties, I am going to my lessons every day. Difficulties do not frighten me or my family.

My parents have done everything so that I would never differ from my peers and so that I would be able to find my place in this life as a valuable person and citizen.

I am really excited with the fact that this year my country also signed the most important document about the rights of disabled people - the UN Convention. Of course I realize that, in our country, it is difficult to implement everything that is said in the Convention at once, in a country where little is known about the rights and the potential of disabled people. In my opinion, disabled people and youth also know little about their rights and that is the main reason why they don’t have faith in their future.

My grandmother was surprised to hear that in the University I was the only student who differs from others. Of course you can seldom see people like me walking in our streets and in public places. I would really like the Convention to force my country to be more attentive to people with different problems and to create equal opportunities for all. Aren’t we all the citizens of the same country? Don’t we have the same rights?

I am sure that we should tell our children more about the rights that the Convention provides, and tell the decision makers about their duties.”

**- Ashot Arsenyan, 17 years old, Republic of Armenia (male)**



*UNICEF facilitated the participation of several young people with disabilities during the treaty negotiations. Pictured here, a disabled young delegate from China addresses the Ad Hoc Committee on the Convention on the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities during its sixth session in January 2006.*

sistance to countries ratifying the Convention, particularly in two areas: (1) the review of national legislation and policies to ensure that children with disabilities and their families have access to basic services, related community-based services and financial support; and (2) data collection and research on the situation of children with disabilities, to create the foundations for effective monitoring of the Convention's

implementation.

The adoption of the Disability Rights Convention is an excellent example of what can be achieved when effective partnerships between civil society and development and human rights actors are created. With such partnerships, the Convention can become a catalyst to mobilize policy makers, communities, families and children, around an agenda of inclusion. ■

*Ann M. Veneman is Executive Director of UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund. She previously served as Director of the California Department of Food and Agriculture, and from 2001 to 2005, served as the United States' first female Secretary of Agriculture.*

“Being born the only disabled child in our family, I had lots of hardships growing up. At home, I was looked at as a burden and a curse. Convincing my parents that I too had a right to education was resisted.

After persistent demands that I be educated as my brothers and sisters, they reluctantly enrolled me at the Oriang' Primary School past the expected age. The first years of my schooling were hard. I was ridiculed by children and teachers who didn't understand my needs. Their attitude made me feel unwanted. It became the lowest point in my life.

In 2002, Oriang' Primary School was selected by Leonard Cheshire International as part of their inclusive education project. Towards the end of that year, I noticed that the number of disabled children in our school had increased. New facilities had been put up such as specially adapted latrines. I started wondering how the community had changed all of a sudden. The right that each and every child is entitled to education is now guaranteed in article 7 of our new UN Convention (CRPD).

I have since joined one of the secondary schools in my locality and to my dismay; disabled students have to undergo lots of difficulties at this level. Surely, more needs to be done.

The new Convention if fully implemented shall make it mandatory for state parties to not only recognize inclusive education as a right but also provide it to each and every child with a disability. The move shall go a long way in affirming Education For All and that every child counts. I conclude by a paraphrase that 'nothing about children without children with disabilities'.”

**- Gaston Opar, 18 years old, Wangapala Secondary School, Kenya (male)**

# Towards Inclusive Development: The Implementation Challenge

BY CHARLOTTE McCLAIN-NHLAPO

There is no doubt that the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) is a watershed event. The passage of the CRPD is important not just for 650 million people with disabilities and their families but for the larger human rights and development agenda.

## THE CRPD — A COMPREHENSIVE FRAMEWORK

The CRPD addresses the full panoply of rights including civil and political rights as well as economic and social rights. It makes persons with disabilities “rights holders” and “subjects of law,” with full participation in formulating and carrying out plans and policies affecting them. The CRPD moves beyond the traditional concept of access to the physical environment, to broader issues of equal access, social opportunities, health, education, employment, political, economic and social development, and elimination of legal and social barriers to equal participation. Governments that ratify the treaty will be legally bound to treat people with disabilities not just as victims or a minority, but as subjects of the law with clearly defined rights.

In addition to being a human rights instrument, the CRPD has a very evident social development perspective — a response to a clarion call from the majority of people with

disabilities who live in developing countries and often in poverty. The CRPD is thus a constructive instrument to make development practices inclusive.

More particularly, the CRPD sets a benchmark for inclusive development to be supported and promoted by States Parties in partnership with relevant regional and international organizations. Furthermore, Article 32 on international cooperation<sup>1</sup> recognizes that implementation is a shared responsibility.

## A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

While the primary responsibility to protect human rights lies with national governments, other States and non-State actors also have a responsibility to act in accordance with international human rights norms and standards.<sup>2</sup> A State which lacks the means to effectively protect basic human rights for its people has an obligation to actively seek international assistance and cooperation. Likewise, States which are in a position to assist have a responsibility to support other states to enable them to ensure adequate protection of rights to their people.

The CRPD places an obligation

<sup>1</sup> Article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol, Adopted 13 December 2006.

<sup>2</sup> UN Charter and International Council on Human Rights Policy 1999.



*In an effort to promote inclusive education, the World Bank partnered with the World Health Organization in Cambodia to ensure that new schools were built with ramps to make them accessible for wheelchair users.*

on States to protect people with disabilities against situations of poverty and social exclusion, including by ensuring an enabling environment that protects human rights standards. It is broadly accepted in the literature that there is as strong link between poverty and disability. This is often compounded by attitudinal barriers of stigma and prejudice and physical barriers related to infrastructure and program design. We know that poverty and the lack of enjoyment of one’s human rights are inextricably linked. We also know that people with disabilities are over-represented among the poor. And yet, persons with disabilities have been largely overlooked in the development agenda.

With a high proportion of developing countries amongst CRPD signatories; this creates a reasonable expectation that in the near future many development actors will be asked by developing countries for assistance in implementation of the

principles and binding obligations countries will incur upon ratification of the CRPD.

Consequently with development implications not only for countries, but also for development organizations, like the World Bank, we should inscribe the principles of the CRPD into our plans, programs and policies. Moreover, the CRPD's substantive articles cover a number of key areas that are relevant to the work of the World Bank, including accessibility, personal mobility, health, education, employment, habilitation and rehabilitation, participation in political life, equality and non-discrimination. It also recognizes the specific protections required by more marginalized groups, namely women and children with disabilities.

A few examples of areas in which States Parties may require implementation assistance from the World Bank include:

- Legislative and policy reform initiatives, banning discriminatory customs and practices (e.g. in education, health, employment, etc.) and promoting alternative approaches that are inclusive of persons with disabilities
- Removal of barriers hindering access to, e.g. the environment, transport, public facilities and information and communication technology, and economic participation<sup>3</sup>
- Statistics and data collection<sup>4</sup>
- Sharing best practices and providing appropriate technical

assistance<sup>5</sup>

- Building partnerships, ensuring close consultation and active involvement of people with disabilities in the process — As the successful negotiation process of the CRPD has demonstrated, the active involvement of people with disabilities and their representative organizations is key to the success of any policy related to disability<sup>6</sup>
- Building capacity and generating knowledge

Also, it is conceivable that once the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is established, they may request that the Bank provide technical advice or assistance<sup>7</sup>.

In recent years, the World Bank has played a key role in the field of inclusive development, both inside and outside the Bank. Inside, working groups serve as reference points for learning about disability and development. Other initiatives include: the development of a social analysis guidance note; an internal disability toolkit for Bank Staff; and a publication on making inclusion operational. Most recently, the Bank has used its convening power for a series of sectoral workshops on the CRPD and a high level workshop on the CRPD and opportunities for international development agencies.

It is important to note that the World Bank does not have a separate policy related to people with disabilities. However, existing policies, procedures and activities can be effectively inclusive of disability issues

in a way that has legal and practical relevance for achieving the World Bank's mandate of fighting poverty.

Fortunately, the interest in inclusive development has not been confined to the World Bank. Increasingly its shareholders have either adopted or considered policies requiring the inclusion of persons with disabilities and disability issues in all development agency financed programming. This is encouraging. It points to how international cooperation for development can facilitate an enabling international environment in which people with disabilities are part of inclusive development. Without losing sight of these gains, it is also important to note that the international community is a long way short of mainstreaming disability into their work.

In conclusion, the passage of the CRPD is a momentous advancement in the field of human rights. It is also a huge step towards inclusive development, with potentially significant implications for poverty reduction. No doubt the challenges to make the CRPD operational are great and will not be instant. But this framework provides an opportunity to build alliances, bring the issue of disability to the development table, address poverty and ensure rights for all.

Finally, with a purposive interpretation of its Articles of Agreement, the World Bank has much to contribute to the operationalization of the CRPD. ■

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*Charlotte McClain-Nhlapo is Senior Operations Officer for the World Bank.*

<sup>3</sup> Article 9 CRPD

<sup>4</sup> Article 31 CRPD

<sup>5</sup> Article 32 CRPD

<sup>6</sup> Article 4(3) CRPD

<sup>7</sup> Article 36 (5) CRPD

# Women with Disabilities: *A Call to Action*

BY ANNE HAWKER AND SEBENZILE MATSEBULA



*During the RI Regional Conference in Tunisia, participants engaged in a dynamic discussion about the challenges faced by women with disabilities and considered solutions to increase inclusion and promote equal rights.*

It has been said that women with disabilities throughout the world often suffer from “triple” discrimination: that of having a disability, of living in poverty, and of being female. Women with disabilities, especially in developing countries, are certainly one of the most marginalized groups of people in the world. UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) identified that in rural areas of developing countries, 80% of women with disabilities have no independent means of making a living and are wholly dependent on others. The impact of this triple discrimination is that women are often shunned, isolated and subjected to abuse, resulting in a lack of self esteem so they often do not access the services that may be available to enhance their abilities.

It is for this reason that, when the UN Convention on the Rights of People with disabilities was being

formulated, the disability community pushed for an article on the rights of women with disabilities. This article encourages national governments to implement and enforce laws that guarantee the rights of women with disabilities, such as the right to attend school and to use public transportation. The Convention’s support of women with disabilities represents an important step in working for equality of all human beings.

The 2008 RI World Congress in Quebec offers a unique opportunity

to explore the issues facing women but far more importantly to develop a Plan of Action to achieve the potential that Article 6 offers. A whole stream of the Congress would be devoted to the development of the Action Plan, with keynote addresses and workshops to further shape the plan. It is anticipated that the Plan of Action would be presented to the Congress on the last day.

The timing of the Congress is also important because it is expected that, by August 2008, the UN Con-

## **Article 6 states:**

1. “States Parties recognize that women and girls with disabilities are subject to multiple discrimination, and in this regard shall take measures to ensure the full and equal enjoyment by them of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.
2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the full development, advancement and empowerment of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of the human rights and fundamental freedoms set out in the present Convention.”



*Over the past three years, RI has been developing initiatives to promote the rights and inclusion of women with disabilities through capacity building and skills training programs in the Arab region and Africa, for example.*

vention will have entered into force and States which have ratified will be looking to the international, regional and national NGO sector to assist with development of implementation plans. How civilized a country is, is often measured by how well it supports its most vulnerable members, of whom women and children with disabilities are amongst the most vulnerable.

The build-up to a successful Congress will require an enormous amount of work on a number of fronts, with a particular emphasis on networking and effective partnerships. Firstly, on the issue of networking, RI must mobilize the significant number of women with disabilities in its network. As part of its commitment to effectively implementing the UN Convention as stated in RI's Strategic Plan, the RI Executive Committee has established a Task Force on Women with Disabilities, to be led by two women with disabilities from the Executive Committee. To support the Executive Committee members and form the Task Force, each region will be asked to appoint as its representative a woman with a disability.

The regional representatives would be responsible for establishing core

contact with each of the National Secretaries in their region, with support from the RI Secretariat. The national representatives would provide input from the grass roots level on the format of the meeting, content of the Action Plan and other relevant issues. These representatives will also be able to provide practical advice on projects, prioritizing those projects so that action can be started quickly. Since a number of RI members have connections with other networks, this will in turn spark more collaboration and enhance the credibility of the approach.

Given the interest and the enormity of the task, this is not something that RI believes it can and should do alone. We have already established important links with Disabled Peoples International (DPI) and other members of the International Disability Alliance (IDA), the International Paralympics Committee, and the International Disability Caucus (IDC).

One of the lessons learned from the Convention on the Rights of the Child is that if the Action Plan is to be a success, then it is important to look for linkages and partnerships outside of the disability field. There are a number of women's organiza-

tions and other organizations who would be useful allies in the implementation of the proposed Plan of Action. Other institutions that could provide valuable advice and information include human rights institutions, the UN, and other national, regional and international agencies. These organizations would also be extremely valuable in providing advice on the logistics for the implementation of any proposed Action Plan.

Enabling the inclusion of women with disabilities as full citizens within their society will be an important hallmark of the success of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. Using networks and partnerships to develop a Plan of Action, which is finalized and launched at the 2008 RI World Congress in Quebec will be a positive contribution to that success. The Plan of Action will be practical and its implementation will rely heavily on the networks and partnerships that will have been formed in the coming year. ■

*Anne Hawker is Chair of the RI Social Commission and President-elect, to begin her term in August 2008. Sebenzile Matsebula is RI Deputy Vice President for the Africa Region.*

# Promoting Dignity and Equality for All

BY MUKHTAR MOHAMMED AL RAWAHI



Credit: UN Photo/Devra Berkowitz

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) is a crowning glory for the continuous efforts of the NGOs active in the disability sector, and of persons with disabilities themselves. The significance of the Convention is reflected in the transformation from viewing persons with disabilities as needy recipients of charity, towards viewing them as holders of rights. The CRPD also sends a strong message promoting a dignified lifestyle for all, and that all human beings are equal.

As noted by Sheikha Hissa Al Thani, UN Special Rapporteur on Disability, during a recent seminar held in Doha, the dignity of persons with disabilities is the essence of the Convention, requiring foremost the fulfillment of their basic human rights. Sheikha Hissa added that governments and organizations should consider persons with disabilities in budgets and provisions, and listen to the opinions of persons with disabilities while setting the policies, plans and projects that will lead to justice and equity for all. International organizations, such as the UN and the World Bank, must also incorporate disability into programs and policies.

In order to achieve a more in-

clusive and respectful society, governments and international organizations must play an active role in raising public awareness of the Convention, through printed and audiovisual materials. Article 8 of the CRPD (on awareness-raising) obliges governments to correct stereotypes and misconceptions, and encourages awareness of the abilities and contributions of persons with disabilities. The Convention also requires those countries that sign and ratify the treaty to create or enforce laws that prohibit discrimination based on any form of disability.

While governments have their obligations, the media, which includes print, internet and radio/television journalism at the local, national and international levels, also assumes a significant responsibility. The media must fulfill its duty to explain the rights in this important convention, and prompt society to eliminate barriers such as social stigmas and discrimination. The media should convey the history of the active and visible participation of persons with disabilities in the negotiating process toward the CRPD. Journalists should report on the shift in thinking in the international community, to the notion that persons with

*Pamela Molina Toleda (centre), Corporación Ciudadanía Real de Sordos de Chile, one of the leaders of the International Disability Caucus, speaking via sign language at a press conference following the UN General Assembly's adoption of the historic Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in December 2006.*

The Convention also requires those countries that sign and ratify the treaty to create or enforce laws that prohibit discrimination based on any form of disability.

Persons with disabilities have inscribed their names in the corridors of the UN, and must now, through the help of the media, extend their call for equality and non-discrimination to all corners of the world.



Credit: UN Photo/Devra Berkowitz

*The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Disability, Sheikha Hessa bint Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani, has played an important role in drawing attention to the need to respect the dignity and equal human rights of persons with disabilities. Pictured here, she is addressing the General Assembly at UN Headquarters in New York.*

disabilities are first and foremost “persons” and should be granted equal human rights. More positive images of persons with disabilities are needed, to focus on human potential instead of taking a perspective of pity. There are also good practices, implemented by members of the global disability community, which must be shared and replicated.

Persons with disabilities have inscribed their names in the corridors of the UN, and must now, through the help of the media, extend their call for equality and non-discrimination to all corners of the world. Civil society organizations, particularly disabled peoples’ organizations, must build relationships with journalists to increase the media’s understanding of disability issues and to use the print and audiovisual media more effectively. This can involve setting up

meetings with journalists, sending advocacy materials and press releases, holding press conferences and inviting media to NGO events.

The key challenge now is for RI and other disabled peoples’ organizations, together with governments, international organizations and media, to explain the CRPD, not only to their own staff and constituencies, but also to reach out to professionals, such as rehabilitation specialists, doctors and architects. Trainings must be conducted and information must be disseminated so that society begins to fully respect the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities worldwide. ■

*Mukhtar Mohammed Al Rawahi is Chairman of the Oman Association for Disabled and RI Deputy Vice President for the Arab Region.*

# Accessibility For All: The Way Forward

BY MICHAEL FOX AND JOSEPH KWAN



Since 2000, RI has been actively involved in all stages of the negotiations toward the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and is currently implementing awareness and capacity-building programs to promote the ratification and effective implementation of this first human rights treaty of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. RI and experts in RI ICTA (International Commission on Technology and Accessibility) were particularly involved in the International Disability Caucus Working Group on Article 9 of the CRPD, which addresses the issue of accessibility, and will continue to play a leading role in the field, as set forth in this article.

## THE RIGHT TO ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility is a fundamental consideration in the process of the equalization of opportunities in all spheres of society. Accordingly, UN Member States, regions and the private sector need to undertake measures to provide access to information and the built environment, and mandate that the design, manufacture and construction of products and environments be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, to lessen any need for adaptation or specialized design. Article 9 of the CRPD provides that States must implement programs of action

to make physical, social and virtual environments more equitable and accessible.

## IMPLEMENTING ACCESSIBILITY

As was widely discussed during the negotiations and articulated in Article 9, access is not just about buildings. Access to information is an essential component in the provision of more equitable opportunities for everyone. This includes media programs and educational training programs on the purpose, mechanisms, and benefits of access. Access awareness programs need to be appropriate and responsive to different social, economic and cultural environments with regular monitoring and evaluations.

Implementation of effective accessibility requires a rights-based approach to legislation, where discrimination on the grounds of

disability is illegal. States must enact and implement laws, standards and regulations to require access to and within all existing, renovated and new environments, together with all types of information, transport, goods, facilities and services open to the public.

These standards and regulations should be consistent with the ISO (International Standards Organization). ISO standards transcend national governments and ISO accreditation for government and business activities is an important goal, as ISO standards are continually reviewed and enhanced.

Rights based accessibility requires effective implementation of realistic and achievable timeframes. These timeframes should present a vision that the goal of accessibility is achievable.

These timeframes include review

## Article 9 requires States

“To enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life, States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas. These measures, which shall include the identification and elimination of obstacles and barriers to accessibility, shall apply to, inter alia:

- (a) Buildings, roads, transportation and other indoor and outdoor facilities, including schools, housing, medical facilities and workplaces;
- (b) Information, communications and other services, including electronic services and emergency services.”

and/or enactment of rights based legislation, and progressive implementation to achieve genuinely accessible, equitable and sustainable environments. In this regard, it is estimated that at least 70 member states do not have any access related legislation.

### THE ICTA VISION

ICTA is widely considered one of the primary expert bodies on assistive technology and accessibility. In fact, RI and ICTA initiated the International Symbol of Access in the 1960s, which is now well-recognized across the globe. The overall objectives of ICTA are:

- To promote the development of an accessible built environment and infrastructures for the elderly and people with disabilities in order that everyone can participate independently and with dignity in all activities of daily living
- To promote the concept of Universal Design, Inclusive Design and Design for All within the planning, architectural, interior and design professions so that it becomes common practice in

the design of the built environment and urban spaces

- To have a positive impact on society and the professionals dealing with built and virtual environments, including ICT and assistive technology

ICTA is comprised of a broad range of professionals and welcomes more experts in the fields of accessibility and assistive technology to join this network. ICTA is also planning to collaborate with other global disability organizations in the International Disability Alliance (IDA), as well as with the International Federation on Aging (IFA), Transport for Elderly and Disabled Persons (TRANSED), International Society for Prosthetics and Orthotics (ISPO), Handicapped International, and regional organizations such as Asia Pacific Disability Forum and UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP). ICTA is also developing partnerships with professional associations such as Architects Council of Europe (ACE), International Union of Architects (UIA), Architects Regional Council of Asia (ARCASIA), and Federation of Pan American Association

of Architects (FPAA). Finally, ICTA intends to work directly with the ISO on the standard: “Accessibly and Usability of the Built Environment”. Activities will include exhibitions, high-level roundtables, trainings and the development of materials to promote accessibility. ICTA will also develop a resource directory on experts in the area of accessible built environment, accessible transportation, assistive technology and ICT, accessible tourism, access to heritage buildings and sites, training and education, and publication.

RI and ICTA look forward to working together to implement Article 9 of the CRPD. Indeed, as noted on the RI accessible website, “Everyone benefits from a more accessible and equitable world.” ■

*Michael Fox is the RI President and is the Director of Access Australia, an architecture consulting company. Joseph Kwan is Chair of ICTA and Director of UDA Consultants Ltd in Hong Kong.*

*For more information about RI and ICTA, visit: [www.riglobal.org](http://www.riglobal.org) and <http://www.ictaglobal.org/>*

**ISO Guide 71**, guidelines for standards to address the needs of older persons and persons with disabilities, is part of the overall ISO framework for standards bodies worldwide to promote more accessible products and services. The Guide includes definitions for accessible design and assistive technology, and other terminology including barrier-free design, inclusive design, universal design and trans-generational design.

The Guide also provides a commentary on alternative formats, including alternative visual and auditory information. Guide 71 identifies general accessibility and usability issues and recognizes that additional sector-related guides need to be developed for specific product and/or service sectors.

ISO Guide 71 is almost identical to CEN Guide 6, created by the European Committee for Standardization (CEN), which commits European standard makers to address the needs of older persons and persons with disabilities.

# Legal Capacity: Fundamental to the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

BY TINA MINKOWITZ

Legal capacity, set forth in Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), is fundamental to all human rights and dignity and its deprivation causes suffering and exclusion. Imagine a situation where you are denied the right to open a bank account, sign a rental contract or refuse a risky medical procedure. These scenarios are not invented, but are a reality for millions of persons with disabilities around the world. In many cases, people with disabilities, often those in the most marginalized circumstances, are put under guardianship and deprived of opportunities to make decisions in their daily lives. Guardianship has been referred to as “civil death” because the person is totally negated as an actor in his or her own life. Abuse of all kinds is facilitated by such legal disempowerment.

In addition to guardianship, other coercive mechanisms deprive people with disabilities of autonomy and prevent them from defending themselves against violence. In particular, institutionalization and non-consensual medical treatments

cause physical and psychic harm and render the person invisible to society, perpetuating disablement.

In Article 12, the old regime has finally been lifted. States must recognize the legal capacity of persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others in all aspects of life. In legal systems that distinguish between capacity for rights and capacity to act, people with disabilities must enjoy both on an equal basis



*Mia Farah of Lebanon, a delegate of Inclusion International during the negotiations, presents her views on the importance of supportive decision-making during the IDC side event.*

In Article 12, the old regime has finally been lifted. States must recognize the legal capacity of persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others in all aspects of life.

with others. This establishes the right and responsibility of people with disabilities to make our own decisions. Article 12 also addresses the situation where people with disabilities may need support to express their will and preferences, i.e. support to exercise their legal capacity. States must provide access to such support and establish safeguards to prevent its abuse and ensure its appropriate-

is necessary in hospital and health care settings, for use on a temporary basis when disability is first identified. Non-consensual treatments must be prohibited and prevented. Free and informed consent in health care is an important aspect of legal capacity, independently guaranteed in Article 25 of the CRPD. People with disabilities have this right on an equal basis with others. The right to

disabilities have the right to freely express themselves, and for their views to be taken into account, on matters concerning themselves, on an equal basis with other children. Children with disabilities also have the right to be provided with age- and disability-appropriate supports to exercise these rights.

In sum, Article 12 is central to achieving the purpose of the Con-

**Accessible communication**  
is important for all types of support and  
may be all that is needed to enable the person  
to exercise legal capacity.

ness to meet individual needs. Support must respect the rights, will and preferences of the person and be free from conflict of interest and undue influence. This means that people with disabilities must be provided with the support they need but can not be required to accept support against their will.

Support is based on the establishment of a trusting relationship in which a person can express his or her wishes. As part of such a relationship, accessible communication can be developed. Accessible communication is important for all types of support and may be all that is needed to enable the person to exercise legal capacity. In particular, accessible communication and availability of independent support

respect for physical and mental integrity guaranteed in Article 17 also protects against forced or coerced medical interventions.

It may be wise to encourage advance planning for support that a person may need in the future, for example if disability progresses or in cases where periods of increased disability may occur. In addition, it is important to reach people early where disability may affect their communication, and to reach out to people currently living in institutions, hidden or isolated from community.

Children with disabilities have an evolving legal capacity, as addressed in articles 3 and 7. Article 7 echoes the Convention on the Rights of the Child, providing that children with

vention to achieve equal effective enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all people with disabilities. Without full legal capacity, a significant proportion of people with disabilities would remain outside the protection of the Convention and be unable to exercise their human rights. With full legal capacity and support to exercise it, people with disabilities move further into the mainstream of society as neighbors, workers, and contributors to family and public life. ■

*Tina Minkowitz, a lawyer, is the Co-Chair of the World Network of Users and Survivors of Psychiatry (WNUSP) and was a member of the Working Group which developed the draft text of the Convention for the negotiations.*



*Making inclusive education a reality in school programs and classes: a successful venture at the Amar Jyoti School, New Delhi, India.*

## Promoting Inclusive Education for Persons with Disabilities

BY PENNY PRICE AND UMA TULI

The drafting of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) featured an unprecedented level of participation from civil society during the five-year process. The International Disability Caucus (IDC), an alliance of more than 70 disability organizations and allied NGOs, formed a series of working groups to focus on the different areas of the Convention. They worked among themselves and also acted as advocacy groups to negotiate the outcome achieved in the Convention text. Considerable negotiation and compromise were necessary to achieve the end result. This was particularly true for Article 24 on Education. Clearly the right to education is a fundamental human right that has been guaranteed for all since the

inception of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 but has not been universally implemented, particularly for persons with disabilities.

Article 24 of the CRPD not only recognizes the right to education for persons with disabilities, but requires that States Parties provide education at all levels in an inclusive education system, with the goals of developing the talents, personality, creativity, physical and mental abilities of all persons with disabilities to their fullest potential. During the negotiations, there was considerable debate over whether children with disabilities should still have access to special education in special schools or classes – separate from their peers – or should be fully included in regular classrooms. The principle of inclu-

sive education is to provide equal opportunities and the necessary infrastructure so that children with and without disabilities can learn together and accept and understand each other from an early age. There was overwhelming support for the principle of inclusive education and this is perhaps the most significant aspect of the article. It means that school systems must change so that all schools are open to ALL children, irrespective of their abilities or disabilities, or other characteristics, and that schools must learn to accommodate the diversity of needs so that all children are included in all aspects of school life.

The final outcome of the article, which was agreed on near the very end of the negotiations, provides that persons with disabilities may



*Making inclusive education a reality in school programs and classes: a successful venture at the Amar Jyoti School, New Delhi, India.*

not be excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability. Furthermore, persons with disabilities must be able to access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in their local communities. Article 24 also requires that the inclusive education system must provide reasonable accommodation of the individual's learning requirements. As defined in Article 2 of the CRPD, reasonable accommodation refers to "the necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments..., where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms." In other words, schools would be required to provide desks which are at the appropriate height for a student with a wheelchair, tactile paths for the visually impaired, and ramps for children with physical disabilities. The toilets would also need to be made barrier free.

Persons with disabilities must also receive the support required to facilitate their effective education within the general education system. Effective individualized support measures must be consistent with the goal of full inclusion and could

include individual education plans and collaborative efforts with a rehabilitation team.

In addition, Article 24 requires States Parties to enable persons with disabilities to learn life and social development skills to facilitate their full and equal participation in education. This includes specific measures to address the needs of children who are blind, deaf and deafblind, such as facilitating the learning of Braille, sign language and alternative modes, means and formats of communication, orientation and mobility skills, peer support and mentoring. One of the key provisions of Article 24 is the emphasis on training professional teachers and staff, including teachers with disabilities, who work at all levels of education, ensuring that such training incorporates disability awareness, appropriate modes and formats of communication, and educational techniques and materials to support persons with disabilities. Article 7 of the CRPD, which focuses on children with disabilities, reinforces the right to education.

These important provisions in the CRPD will lead to an expansion of inclusive education approaches within national education systems, and an increase in the numbers of children and adults with disabilities

able to access education, particularly in developing countries, where the numbers of children not in school have been estimated to be as high as 90 per cent of children. The Convention will also have a positive impact on the quality of education and the capacity of education systems to respond appropriately and effectively to the diverse needs of persons with disabilities. A further benefit will be an increased global concern with monitoring the situation of persons with disabilities, particularly children with disabilities, in terms of their access to education, and their inclusion in the assessment of progress towards the achievement of such international programs as the UNESCO Education For All framework and the Millennium Development Goals. Disabled peoples' organizations and allied NGOs should celebrate this important victory for the right to education and stay vigilant to ensure that governments fulfill their commitments to persons with disabilities worldwide. ■

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*Penny Price is Chair of the RI Education Commission; Dr. Uma Tuli is the Founder of Amarjyoti Charitable Trust in Delhi, India and serves as Regional Chair for Asia-Pacific for the RI Education Commission.*



## Collaboration is Key for Inclusive and Accessible HIV/AIDS Outreach to Persons with Disabilities

BY NORA GROCE AND GIDION MANDESI

Greater attention to the links between HIV/AIDS, disability and human rights is critical to addressing one of the most pressing problems facing the globe today. All segments of the disability community – that is, all people with physical, sensory, psychosocial and intellectual disabilities – are among the people most at-risk of contracting HIV/AIDS in urban and rural areas, in developed and developing countries. However, stigma surrounding disability, the common assumption that persons with disabilities are at little risk of infection and inaccessibility to appropriate infor-

mation on HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) have too often excluded persons with disability from AIDS education, prevention and care efforts. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities includes key provisions to challenge this discrimination and inequality. Persons with disabilities have a right to and a need for HIV/AIDS interventions worldwide. Global efforts to combat HIV/AIDS must also target and engage persons with disabilities. Health centers must be made accessible; HIV education and materials should be available. Community health workers and oth-

*Dr. Nora Groce (center) and Gidion Mandesi conducted a training of disability advocates and HIV/AIDS outreach workers on HIV, disability rights and leadership skills, held in Tanzania in December 2006. This was part of an RI project being carried out in Tanzania and Mozambique, with the support of the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida).*

ers must be trained. These are among some of the strategies discussed in this article.

Experience and studies have shown that persons with disabilities have equal or greater exposure to all known risks and factors for infections. Thus, mainstream organizations in the field of HIV/AIDS, in partnership with disabled persons' organizations (DPOs), should be encouraged and supported by international and bilateral funding agencies to make HIV/AIDS interventions targeting persons with disabilities all over the world. Good practices and communication strategies for target-

ing HIV/AIDS interventions to persons with disabilities in mainstream existing programs must be shared. Different actors such as care givers and HIV/AIDS outreach workers must also be encouraged to support HIV/AIDS education to persons with disabilities by developing more inclusive programs and working together with DPOs. This could help reach more persons with disabilities at the grass roots level.

One of the main barriers for persons with disabilities is that health centers and HIV clinics are not accessible for persons with disabilities. Such centers do not have the physical infrastructure (for example, ramps for persons in wheelchairs, Braille signage, etc.) or they are located too far for persons with mobility or other disabilities, particularly persons in rural areas. Efforts must be undertaken to make health centers most accessible and to provide mobile HIV/AIDS health programs. Special care must be taken to have specially-trained health workers, who can assist persons with disabilities during their visit; this includes provisions for sign language interpretation so persons with hearing impairments can receive confidential information about their HIV status.

Furthermore, advocacy and awareness materials on HIV/AIDS, prevention and care should be developed in easy to understand and accessible formats for different kinds of persons with disabilities and widely disseminated to reach persons with disabilities in both rural and urban areas. A collaborative strategy between HIV organizations and DPOs enables each disability group to provide appropriate information

in accessible communication formats depending on individual needs and impairments e. g. Braille format for the blind, sign language interpretation services for deaf people and large print for people with low vision. Access to HIV/AIDS educational materials in accessible formats is not just a health issue. It is also a legal right. As a matter of rights, persons with disabilities are fully entitled to have access to information about HIV/AIDS transmission and preventive measures.

Scaling up best practices on HIV/AIDS educational materials for persons with disabilities worldwide is also needed. Basic technical work on HIV/AIDS interventions for persons with disabilities has been done by a small but growing number of DPOs in developing countries. For example, DOLASED Tanzania, RI and Yale University have recently designed HIV/AIDS educational materials specifically for disabled adolescents and young adults in Tanzania and Mozambique. These materials will be launched on December 13, the day of the CRPD's adoption by the UN General Assembly one year ago, and will be available and will be available in accessible formats through the RI website ([www.riglobal.org](http://www.riglobal.org)) or by request (email: [ri@riglobal.org](mailto:ri@riglobal.org)). Such educational materials can be used or adapted in other parts of the world to reach persons with disabilities.

Young adults with disabilities should not only be recipients of programs — they should also be trained as peer HIV/AIDS and health educators. This strategy is essential to supporting persons with disabilities themselves to take active roles in

training and educating other members of the disability community on how best to control the spread of HIV/AIDS.

In all of these approaches to HIV/AIDS, attention should be given to utilizing existing strong legal frameworks in many countries that already prohibit discrimination on the grounds of disability. The basic principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities — equality and non-discrimination, full inclusion and accessibility — should be guaranteed to all persons with disabilities, including people living with HIV/AIDS. Therefore, persons with disabilities and local disability advocacy groups must take an active role in implementing the Convention into domestic legislation and policies on HIV/AIDS — ensuring that persons with disabilities are fully included — and promoting their enforcement for the benefit of all individuals with disabilities in their countries. There is much work to be done, but the impact of HIV/AIDS on persons with disabilities is far too great a problem and must be addressed through collaboration and capacity-building. ■

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*Dr. Nora Groce is an Associate Professor in the School of Public Health at Yale University and serves regularly as an advisor to UN agencies, the World Bank and NGOs. Gidion Mandesi is Executive Director of Disabled Organization for Legal Affairs and Social Economic Development (DOLASED) in Tanzania, and serves as RI Vice President for the Africa Region.*

# Rehabilitation and Habilitation: Powerful Tools for Empowerment

BY FEDERICO MONTERO

According to information provided by UN agencies, including the World Health Organization, UNESCO, UNICEF and others, we know that access to habilitation and rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities is limited or unavailable in many countries. It is estimated that only 2% of persons with disabilities in developing countries have access to habilitation and rehabilitation services, and only 5% - 15% of persons who require assistive devices and technologies have access to them.

These figures must be seen in the context that: 80% of the world's 650 million persons with disabilities live in developing countries; persons with disabilities have been estimated to make up 15% to 20% of the poor in developing countries; as many as

50% of disabilities are directly linked to poverty; and 80% of persons with disabilities are unemployed. The lack of access to habilitation and rehabilitation services has also a direct influence on the fact that mortality for children with disabilities may be as high as 80%, in countries where under-five mortality as a whole has decreased to below 20%.

Primary health care focuses on the main health problems of the communities, and rehabilitation was established as one of the main pillars of this strategy almost 30 years ago. However, habilitation and rehabilitation have been the weakest components of health care all over the world. Access to health, but also access to habilitation and rehabilitation services will make a difference to persons with disabilities by enabling

Health is a fundamental right and habilitation and rehabilitation are powerful tools for empowerment.

**Rehabilitation** is a process aimed at enabling persons with disabilities to reach and maintain their optimal physical, sensory, intellectual, psychiatric and/or social functional levels, thus providing them with the tools to change their lives towards a higher level of independence.

*UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities*

**Habilitation** is described as the wide range of ways used to assist in enabling persons who are born with disabilities. Rehabilitation and habilitation go far beyond the medical field and embraces a wide range of issues including education, social counseling, vocational training, transportation, accessibility and assistive technology.

*RI position paper on the Right to [Re]habilitation (May 2004)*



*The lack of access to habilitation and rehabilitation services in developing countries has an alarming impact on the lives of children and mothers alike. Pictured here, children waiting outside a rehabilitation center in Benin.*

them to go to school, stay employed and fully participate in community life. Health is a fundamental right and habilitation and rehabilitation are powerful tools for empowerment.

As Article 26 affirms: “States Parties shall organize, strengthen and extend comprehensive habilitation and rehabilitation services and programmes, particularly in the areas of health, employment, education and social services....” There is no doubt that this provision will contribute to improving the quality of life and empowerment of many persons with disabilities around the world. But equally relevant is the fact that the article also requests that the services should begin at the earliest possible stage; support participation and inclusion in the community; promote the development of initial and continuing training for professionals and staff working on these services; and promote the availability, knowledge and use of assistive devices and technologies. All of these elements are essential to assure the full impact

of habilitation and rehabilitation services, and to contribute to the full social inclusion of persons with disabilities.

We can not analyze Article 26 independent of the other provisions in the Convention since they are all interrelated. For example, Article 33, paragraph 3 states that “Civil society, in particular persons with disabilities and their representative organizations, shall be involved and participate fully in the monitoring process.” Indeed, the role of civil society was crucial in the development and approval of the Convention. DPOs will continue to be directly involved in assuring that Article 26 and other provisions in the Convention, a legal instrument which represents one of the greatest achievements of the disability movement, will be fully implemented all over the world.

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*Federico Montero is a physician at the National Rehabilitation Center in San José, Costa Rica.*

**Civil society, in particular persons with disabilities and their representative organizations, shall be involved and participate fully in the monitoring process.**

# Right to Work and Employment:

## Promoting Inclusion and Integration

BY BARBARA MURRAY



*Disabled jobseekers at a Hangzhou Job Fair, China.*

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) will bring about a dramatic change in the way in which opportunities for women and men with disabilities of working age will be shaped in policies and programs in many countries of the world, once it enters into force. While not creating new rights, the CRPD will affect the opportunities of around 470 million disabled men and women of working age to obtain freely chosen decent work, either in formal employment or self employment, through its provisions on vocational training, work and employment.

The ILO welcomes the recognition in the CRPD of the right of persons with disabilities to gain a living by work which they freely choose or accept, based on the principles of equal opportunity, equal treatment and non-discrimination, and the provision for protection of this right through legislation, including the right of persons with disabilities to join trade unions. The provision for reasonable accommodation and affirmative action in the form of special measures, including policies and measures to encourage employers to recruit disabled persons, will

ensure significant progress to making workplaces more accessible and inclusive.

In practical terms, the CRPD will mean that people with disabilities will have the right to apply for jobs alongside non-disabled persons and will be protected by the non-discrimination clause in the Convention. It will mean that, increasingly, workers with disabilities will have the same rights as other workers in the workplace and will have equal opportunities for career advancement. It will mean that more and more persons with disabilities in developing countries will be supported in setting up micro and small businesses. It will mean that Governments will hire more job seekers with disabilities, and introduce policies and measures to encourage employers in the private sector to recruit workers with disabilities. Workplaces and practices will be adapted to accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities and will become more accessible, and employers and trade unions will be called on to play greater roles in the social and economic integration of disabled persons.

Men and women with disabilities will become more competitive in the

labor market through improved access to general technical and vocational guidance programs, placement services and vocational and continuing training, as well as vocational rehabilitation, job retention and return-to-work programs. Improved accessibility of workplaces, along with improved access to transport and access to information in written and electronic form, all called for by the CRPD, will contribute to the process of inclusion.

The ILO looks forward to promoting the CRPD provisions on training, work and employment, and those on social security, habilitation and rehabilitation, along with the ILO Convention concerning Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons and Code of Practice on Managing Disability in the Workplace. Together, these instruments will give renewed impetus to the movement towards full participation with equality of persons with disabilities in societies around the world. ■

*Barbara Murray is the Senior Specialist on Disability at the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Geneva.*

# Article 33: A Catalyst for Domestic Change

BY GERARD QUINN

**Y**ou do not have to be a legal realist to understand that elegant words on paper do not, on their own, bring about change. The pure ether of international law is often exquisitely detached from the raw edges of human experience. The plain truth is that change nearly always happens locally. While there has been a reform movement in the disability field around the world for the best part of two decades, it has been driven mainly by local considerations. Now that there is a high level legal instrument at the international level on disability, the main challenge ahead is to harness it effectively to ensure that the reform process acquires more coherence and that it touches all countries in the world.

Getting a good dynamic of reform going is the most important priority. Several background assumptions come into play. First, this assumes an organized and vocal civil society — one that can successfully articulate arguments for change based on the norms of the Convention. DPOs have advanced significantly since the drafting process began. They now have to exercise the same dexterity of policy entrepreneurship much closer to home.

Secondly, it assumes a responsive democratic order — one that will take notice of the voices of persons with disabilities and respond appropriately. Sadly, this is not the case in all parts of the world which only serves to give added significance to the need to ensure that development aid is leveraged correctly.

Thirdly, to a certain extent, it assumes a rich tapestry of domestic bodies dedicated to identifying and advancing the public interest. Indeed, it further assumes that these bodies are sensitive to the voices of persons with disabilities. These bodies include an independent judiciary, law reform bodies and national human rights institutions.

In essence, embedding a self-sustaining process or dynamic of reform depends on getting a transmission belt flowing between the Convention and domestic circumstances. Article 33 is unique in an international human rights instrument. It separates out what might be termed ‘implementation’ issues from general ‘monitoring’ issues.

Article 33 (1) envisages one or more ‘focal points’ within government relating to the ‘implementation’ of the Convention. Presumably, if there is to be a diversity of ‘focal

“It would be deceiving the peoples of the world to let them think that a legal provision was all that was required... when in fact an **entire social structure** had to be changed.”

- Rene Cassin  
(quoted by Asia/Pacific Forum,  
Disability Issues paper,  
September 2007)



*Anuradha Mohit of India (left) and Gerard Quinn of Ireland. Ms Mohit was the “disability focal point” for the International Coordination Committee of National Institutions (national human rights institutions, traditional human rights commissions, ombudspersons and other equality bodies) during the convention negotiations and Gerard Quinn is the current “focal point”.*

points’, they should be structured along functional lines. At the same time Article 33 announces a preference of sorts for a ‘coordination’ mechanism within government to facilitate ‘joined up thinking’ with respect to disability. As the Asia Pacific Forum points out in the aforementioned Disability Issues Paper of 2007, this serves many purposes including facilitating advocacy and growing expertise within government. To simply add the Convention to the competency of a national human rights commission will not be enough to meet the requirements of Article 33 (1).

And with respect to ‘monitoring’, Article 33 (2) innovates by requiring States to “maintain, strengthen designate or establish” a “framework” which may include “one or more independent mechanisms” in order to “promote, protect and monitor implementation.” The wording is interesting. In essence, it calls for a domestic “framework” that may include one or a plurality of independent mechanisms to perform the functions of ‘promoting, protecting and monitoring’ implementation. So conceivably, a plurality of such mechanisms might be engaged depending on the function to be

performed and indeed as appropriate in federal states.

‘Promoting’ is presumably broad enough to encompass not merely traditional forms of awareness raising but also encouraging State ratification as well as the incorporation of the Convention into domestic incorporation. It may also stretch to the choice of nominee for the new treaty monitoring body.

‘Protecting’ presumably includes using whatever complaints mechanisms are available including judicial and administrative to vindicate the rights of persons with disabilities. And ‘monitoring’ presumably refers to periodic assessments of progress achieved and obstacles encountered in the domestic implementation of the Convention. Authoritative assessments of the pace and degree of change are quite crucial in keeping a reform momentum going.

Article 33 (2) also requires States to take into account “principles relating to the status and functioning of national institutions [NIs] for protection and promotion of human rights.” This is a thinly veiled reference to the Principles relating to the Status of National Institutions (Paris Principles), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1993.

The plain truth is that change nearly always happens **locally.**

The picture that emerges from Article 33 is that of a window that lets in the **fresh air of international law** and that seeks to link up the norms of the Convention with a domestic process of change.

Article 33 (2) does not mean that the Principles apply to each and every component of the “framework”. But it would look strange - to say the least — if a core component of the “framework” lacked fidelity to the Principles or if they were ignored altogether.

The Principles set out the competence and responsibilities of NIs which include the responsibility to make recommendations with respect to the promotion and protection of human rights. They also deal with composition (which shall include a “pluralist representation” of social forces) and guarantees of independence as well as methods of operation.

These institutions comprise traditional human rights commissions, ombudspersons and other equality bodies. In fact, they are organized at four regional levels (Africa, Europe, Asia/Pacific and the Americas) and coordinated by an International Coordinating Committee (ICC) which is serviced by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva. The ICC appointed a representative to each negotiating session of the Convention.

In keeping with the overall spirit of the Convention — which is an attitude of inclusion — Article 33 (3) takes the next logical step of requiring that civil society (and especially persons with disabilities themselves and their representative organizations) “shall be involved and participate fully in the monitoring process.” Most treaty monitoring bodies look with disfavour upon States that do not involve civil society in the drafting of their periodic reports. This goes further. It explicitly re-

quires such engagement with respect to national ‘monitoring’ which is quite crucial in keeping a domestic dynamic of reform going. As such, it reflects a general requirement with respect to the consultation of persons with disabilities in Article 4(3).

So the picture that emerges from Article 33 is that of a window that lets in the fresh air of international law and that seeks to link up the norms of the Convention with a domestic process of change. It locks onto the existing institutional architecture of change by engaging implementation bodies and seeking their coordination. This should give fresh impetus to change since one of the big problems in disability has been the ‘silo effect’ of individual departments going their separate (and irreconcilable) ways. It engages independent mechanisms of “promotion, protection and monitoring” by trying to ensure that they take on the disability issue and mainstream it into their ongoing activities. Most importantly, it seeks to give voice to persons with disabilities in the vital task of monitoring the process change.

Article 33 triangulates between executive efficiency, independent scrutiny and voice. Unless this triangulation can be triggered into life at the domestic level, the Convention will remain only words. ■

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# International Monitoring: The Right to Inclusion, The Obligation to Participate

BY KIRSTEN YOUNG AND SHANTHA RAU

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and its Optional Protocol are unique for many reasons. Among the noteworthy outcomes of the Convention were the “paradigm shift” — stressing the rights and contributions of persons with disabilities instead of seeing persons with disabilities as people with medical problems or in need of charity — and the unprecedented involvement of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in the negotiations. This principle of “nothing about us without us” was further exemplified in the composition of the future treaty monitoring body. Building on these achievements, disabled persons’ organizations (DPOs) and allied NGOs must continue to work together to ensure that the monitoring body lives up to the promise of the international human rights system, a system designed to promote and protect the rights of all.

Following lengthy negotiations, the CRPD includes provisions to establish an expert body that sits at the international level and whose objective is to monitor States Parties’ implementation of their obligations under the Convention. This expert body is part of a broader system of “treaty bodies,” all monitoring the implementation of their respective treaties. The CRPD’s treaty body will

The principle of “nothing about us without us” was further exemplified in the composition of the future treaty monitoring body.

be known as the “Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities” (the Committee). Critical functions of the Committee include examination of reports by governments, DPOs, NGOs and National Human Rights Institutions. This process creates opportunities for constructive dialogue among these key stakeholders regarding national priorities, successes and good practices, as well as challenges in meeting Convention obligations. An effective reporting process requires a government to undertake an internal review of its laws, policies and practices, engaging all actors, particularly DPOs.

Once the Committee has reviewed a State’s report as well as reports coming from other stakeholders, such as DPOs, the Committee will engage directly with that government. After this process, the Committee issues “concluding observations” or “comments,” which represent the Committee’s understanding of how the Convention is being implemented and also includes clear operational recommendations to that government on how its implementa-

tion can be improved. Follow-up on recommendations has tended to be the weakest aspect of treaty bodies’ work. DPOs are in a unique position, given their broad representative membership in all regions of the world, to maintain pressure on governments to follow up with their obligations under the CRPD and the recommendations made by the Committee. DPOs and allied NGOs can also play a significant role in raising awareness about the recommendations, by using these reports and recommendations as advocacy tools. NGOs can also write their own reports (often called “shadow reports”) to monitor progress toward full and effective implementation of the treaty in their country.

The CRPD is the first UN human rights treaty that calls on States Parties to nominate experts coming from the target group to serve on the Committee. The express inclusion of “experts with disabilities” among the criteria for Committee members provides a critical opportunity for DPOs and allied NGOs to ensure that the most qualified people are nominated by a State Party. Experts with disabilities have the potential to not only shape the Committee’s work, but also demonstrate the capabilities and valuable contributions of persons with disabilities. The inclusion of experts with disabilities in the Committee reinforces

the principles of the Convention and actually implements the CRPD by reducing the stigma associated with disabilities and promoting the participation of persons with disabilities in decision-making bodies. Other criteria for nomination to the Committee include consideration of “equitable geographical distribution, representation of the different forms of civilization and of the principal legal systems [and] balanced gender representation.”

The CRPD also explicitly calls on States Parties to closely consult with DPOs during the nomination of candidates to the Committee. Although experts are nominated by a State Party, that State Party would have to garner support for its candidate from other States Parties in the same region. The support is given for a range of reasons, usually political. Nevertheless, DPOs and allied NGOs need to be aware of this system and promote a transparent and fair nomination and election process in all States Parties. During the nominations/elections process, DPOs and NGOs can:

- Advocate for national consultations between the government and DPOs and allied NGOs on possible candidates to be nominated by the State Party, according to the criteria established in the CRPD. In fact, the CRPD calls on States to consult persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in Article 34(3).
- Promote the widespread and timely dissemination of the qualifications of each candidate considered for nomination.
- Share information and work

with DPOs in the region and internationally to ensure that the most qualified candidate is nominated and elected from the region.

- Organize national forums where representatives of the disability community have an opportunity to speak with candidates for the Committee.
- Work with other human rights organizations to promote a fair and transparent elections process.

Once a candidate is nominated, DPOs and other allied NGOs must continue to monitor the elections, promoting the most qualified candidates (instead of the usual back-door political deals). In this regard, the disability community can reach out to the media to raise awareness of this process as well as the Convention.

The nomination and election process as well as the actual work of the Committee are key areas for advocacy for DPOs and allied NGOs. Once the Committee of Experts has been established, DPOs and NGOs can:

- Urge States Parties to submit their reports in a timely manner through meetings with and letters to government officials.
- Ensure that the government consults with DPOs and allies during the preparation of its report.
- Conduct assessments of the situation facing people with disabilities in their community, country or region. This information should be shared with a broader audience to inform advocacy and can also be used

in the shadow reporting.

- Prepare “shadow” reports on the country’s progress toward full implementation of the CRPD (most effectively done in broad civil society collaboration).
- Raise awareness of the recommendations made by the Committee through media outreach (press releases, press conferences) and dissemination (to other organizations, on websites, at relevant events).
- Ensure that States Parties widely disseminate the Committee’s recommendations in national languages and in accessible formats for all types of disabilities.
- Maintain pressure on the government to implement the CRPD and the Committee’s recommendations.
- Identify key partners and civil society organizations (women’s groups, human rights organizations, children’s rights organizations, etc) with whom to partner in promoting effective implementation.

To ensure the greatest impact, organizations involved in the process toward implementation of the Convention should continue to work together and seize this opportunity to strengthen and expand partnerships with other key actors in the human rights and development fields as well as with the media; together, our voices will be louder and stronger, with echoes heard around the globe. ■

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*Kirsten Young is the Director of Rights and Advocacy for Landmine Survivors Network. Shantha Rau is Senior Program Officer for RI.*

# First Arab-African Conference on Disability: Advocating for Human Rights and an End to Armed Conflict

BY LAUREN GOLDY

More than 500 people from more than 50 countries attended the first-ever Arab — African Regional Conference on Disability, organized by RI and the General Association of Persons with Motor Deficiencies (AGIM) from 24-26 October 2007. The theme of the Conference, “Rights-Decade-Partnership,” focused on how disabled persons’ organizations, service providers, NGOs, governments and UN agencies can form partnerships to promote the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The location of Djerba, Tunisia, at the intersection of the Arab and African regions, also reflected the focus on the ongoing African and Arab Decades on Disability, initiatives launched by the United Nations to raise awareness of the human rights of persons with disabilities within the two regions. Furthermore, as RI Vice President for the Arab Region, Khaled El Mohtar, stated in the opening of the three-day meeting, “This conference presents a unique opportunity for networking and exchanging ideas and strategies to ensure that governments establish the necessary legal frameworks that respect the human rights of all. Governments should sign and ratify



*RI Vice President for the Arab Region, Khaled El Mohtar, presented the RI Djerba Declaration, adopted by all participants at the close of the Regional Conference.*

the CRPD and take measures for effective and prompt implementation.”

Keynote speakers included Ambassador Luis Gallegos of Ecuador, who served as the first Chair of the UN Ad Hoc Committee during the treaty negotiations. Ambassador Gallegos discussed how the CRPD helps further the paradigm shift from a medical model to a human rights model of disability, resulting in a “new universal language” that will revolutionarily change the way societies look at disability. He remarked, “I witnessed how the disability com-

munity transformed the world.” He warned, however, that the work has only just begun; a key task will be to build the capacity of disability advocates, scholars and other stakeholders who will need to educate and continue to shape societal views.

Serving as an example to other countries in both the Arab and African regions, Tunisia signed the CRPD and its Optional Protocol on the opening day of 31 March 2007, and is expected to ratify early next year. Tunisia also recently unveiled changes to its national disability leg-

isolation, particularly with respect to integrating persons with disabilities in the labor force. Tunisia's example will hopefully spur other governments in the regions to also create new laws and policies that fully comply with the Convention, and to seek cooperation with persons with disabilities and their representative organizations to carry out those laws.

Speakers such as the Minister of Social Affairs, Solidarity and Tunisians Abroad and Conference President, His Excellency Ali Al Chawesh, mentioned some of the challenges for those working to promote the CRPD across the regions. For example, more research and statistics on disability is needed to better understand and respond to the needs of persons with disabilities. Also, effective implementation will require the active roles of not just governments, but also NGOs, government bodies, and the private sector. Society as a whole must recognize the rights of persons with disabilities as a top priority, and advocates will have to pressure governments to use all resources available to implement the Convention. At the close of the Conference, participants issued a statement urging their governments to sign, ratify and implement the CRPD, and encouraging strong partnership among all sectors.

Another key issue raised during the regional conference was the relationship between armed conflict and disability, since wars, armed conflicts, attacks on civilians, use of landmines, cluster bombs and other forms of destruction are leading causes of disability. As Article 11 of the CRPD notes, armed conflicts have a horrific impact on persons

Society as a whole must **recognize the rights of persons with disabilities** as a top priority, and advocates will have to pressure governments to use all resources available to implement the Convention.

with disabilities, particularly since persons with disabilities are among the most neglected groups during the conflicts. In addition, as a result of the violent climate, persons with disabilities are frequently victims of hate crimes, and children with disabilities, in particular, are often among the most exploited in the sexual trade.

In her keynote address, the UN Special Rapporteur on Disability, Sheikha Hessa Al-Thani, a native of Qatar, identified two major challenges: increasing the availability of statistics and building awareness regarding armed conflict and disability. Governments must also understand that rehabilitation is a right, which enables independence. In this regard, more resources must be allocated to develop comprehensive rehabilitation programs that consider the full range of effects of violence, including psychic trauma. Sheikha Hessa noted that the billions spent per year on armament diverts money away from health care and other areas that otherwise would be sufficient to achieve the UN Millennium Development Goals. Finally, most importantly, governments must consult with persons with disabilities to ensure that the programs fully respect the integrity and independence of individuals.

Salma Ahmed Ali Geneif, a participant from Sudan noted, "The ongoing conflicts throughout Africa have resulted in an increase in the population of persons with disabilities. The Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) program in Sudan is just starting to address the rights of persons with disabilities by providing rehabilitation services and

A key task will be to **build the capacity of disability advocates, scholars and other stakeholders who will need to educate and continue to shape societal views.**



*RI members from the Arab and African regions, as well as from other parts of the world, considered how the RI network can promote the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities.*

education, but political and inter-tribal conflicts still make it difficult to reach persons with disabilities in Darfur. Organizations need to have the funds and more capacity to provide much-needed accessible information and services about the rights embedded in the new UN Convention, particularly to women in rural areas, who often receive little or no education. This problem is compounded by the fact that Sudan is a large country with a weak infrastructure, and little is known about the CRPD, which is still relatively new.”

The participants adopted a statement declaring that the use of armed conflict was immoral to resolve social, border, political and other disputes. The statement calls on RI to take the initiative, together with the UN Special Rapporteur, UN agencies, international NGOs, and governments to form a Special Task Force to raise awareness and take

appropriate actions regarding the horrendous impact of armed conflicts on disability and people with disabilities, including through the launch of an international media campaign on the issue.

During the closing session, RI President Michael Fox stated, “By adopting this statement, RI and our global partners can assist in developing media awareness campaigns and appropriate strategies to address the tragic and inequitable impact on armed conflicts on people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.”

In keeping with the spirit for action reflected in the Conference outcome documents, the UN Convention and the issue of armed conflict promise to be at the forefront of the disability movement in Arab and African regions for 2008 and beyond. ■

*Lauren Goldy is the RI Program Officer, based in New York.*



## RI World Congress 2008 Focuses on Disability Rights and Social Participation

BY CLERMONT SIMARD AND PATRICK FOUGEYROLLAS

The international community is facing a unique opportunity to drastically improve the living conditions of hundreds of millions of people with disabilities by implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This treaty provides the framework for the development of good policies, actions and projects which can really make a positive impact on the lives of people with disabilities worldwide.

In an effort to promote knowledge-sharing and partnerships, people with disabilities, their families, human rights advocates, experts, government representatives, service providers and civil society leaders from all over the world are invited to gather in Quebec City, Canada from August 25-28, 2008, for the 21st RI World Congress. The aim of the RI World Congress, under the theme “Disability Rights and Social Participation: Ensuring a Society for All”, is to share concrete good practices at the local, regional, national and international levels, and to build

effective alliance strategies for the implementation and monitoring of the Convention. Participants in the World Congress will explore the following questions:

- How do we ensure full participation and empowerment of people with disabilities in society?
- How can we promote the adoption of best practices that take into account the wide range of disabilities and different age groups?
- What are the most effective measures to implement and monitor the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities?
- What are the respective responsibilities of government, service providers, the public and private sectors and society, including organizations of people with disabilities and their families and non-government organizations, with respect to ensuring full social participation and self-determination of people with

disabilities?

- In light of globalization and the growing gap between industrialized and poor countries, how can we strengthen partnerships and collaboration between actors in the disability field in a North-South perspective?

These questions touch upon the development and implementation of inclusive and adequate social policies concerning people who live with various disabilities, women and men of all ages. Such questions are based on a contemporary definition of social participation of people with disabilities. According to this perspective, the quality of social participation cannot be defined only by an individual’s diagnosis, disability, or cognitive or functional limitation. Adequate consideration must be given to the interaction between people with disabilities and effective possibilities offered by their surrounding environment coupled with the social, economic and political responsibilities of all stakeholders. The reality

The reality of disability is not only the problem of a social minority since **disability affects almost every person in society** at some point in their lives.



*During the RI Governing Assembly, Patrick Fougeyrollas, President of the 21st World Congress in Quebec, invited all RI members to submit ideas and abstracts for the program of this important meeting.*

of disability is not only the problem of a social minority since disability affects almost every person in society at some point in their lives.

The RI World Congress Quebec 2008 provides a platform to raise global awareness of the Convention and urge governments to make disability rights and inclusion a high priority in their domestic agendas. Canada has a long history of human rights advocacy and has been an active partner, together with organizations of persons with disabilities, in the international disability rights movement. The Government of Canada signed the Convention in March 2007 in response to strong pressure from civil society. The Quebec Office of People with Disabilities is presently coordinating a provincial consultation process for defining more effective and measurable mechanisms to monitor the work of all Quebec stakeholders, including civil society, and private and public sectors. Since a large part of the implementation of the Con-

vention is under the responsibility of provincial governments, a specific coordination and intergovernmental agreement must be met before ratification. This work will be of a crucial importance to ensure effective implementation of the Convention and will be among the examples of good practices to be shared at the RI World Congress.

We hope you will join us in Quebec to participate in this important dialogue on how to use the Convention to make a real difference for people with disabilities. To learn more about the World Congress or submit abstracts, please visit: [www.riquebec2008.org](http://www.riquebec2008.org). ■

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*Clermont Simard is the Chair of RI's Leisure, Recreation and Physical Activities Commission and Patrick Fougeyrollas is RI's Deputy Vice-President North America. They are President and Secretary, respectively, of the 21st RI World Congress in Quebec.*

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