

## The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

### What will this mean for ILEP Members?

The Convention, adopted by the General Assembly on the 13th December 2006, is the first major human rights treaty of the 21st century. The Convention will be open to the 192 member states for signature, ratification and implementation from the 30<sup>th</sup> March 2007. It will enter into force once ratified by 20 countries.

ILEP hopes the Convention will finally ensure that countries will no longer be allowed to relegate persons with disabilities to the margins of society. Governments that ratify it will be legally bound to treat persons with disabilities as subjects of the law with clearly defined rights.

The 50-article Convention elaborates in detail the rights of persons with disabilities. It covers, among others, civil and political rights, accessibility, participation and inclusion, the right to education, health, work and employment and social protection. Importantly, the Convention recognizes that a change of attitude in society is necessary if persons with disabilities are to achieve equal status. The text is available at <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/>.

Countries that ratify the treaty agree to enact laws and other measures to improve disability rights, and also to abolish legislation, customs and practices that discriminate against persons with disabilities. Currently only some 45 countries have legislation that deal with persons with disabilities.

This important new convention will have far reaching consequences for all people with disabilities, including those affected by leprosy. ***But only if we make it work.***

As all ILEP Members already know, disabled people face a multitude of barriers that limit their access to education, employment, housing, transportation, health care and rehabilitation, and recreation. The economic and social exclusion that is a reality for disabled people in developing countries is, without question, a major development issue. The principle of inclusive development in the UN Convention on the rights of Persons with Disabilities will help to remove the barriers and to include disabled people in development.

I was fortunate to be present at a recent Conference of key decision makers and experts from the development sector, including the United Nations and World Bank which met on 20 – 21 November in Brussels. Meeting for the first time, EU Member State Government officials, the major development agencies and non-government organisations from the North and South agreed a way forward for the EU to implement the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* so that it positively impacts on people with disabilities living in developing countries.

The Conference participants concluded that:

1. All future spending and policies by, and of, the EU and the EU member states must fully respect the terms of the Convention - notably that mechanisms and communication tools must be developed to promote the rights provided by the Convention
2. Greater funding support is urgently needed to build the capacity of disabled people's organisations (DPOs) in developing countries with a demand-led approach from the South.
3. Broad based cooperation between all actors around the world is needed to promote and monitor the signature, ratification and implementation of the Convention; DPOs play a key and pivotal role in this regard.

In the coming weeks and months I very much hope that ILEP Members and the many thousands of leprosy affected persons they work with, will do everything they can to campaign for Member States to sign and ratify the Convention. We need to publicise and promote the existence of this new historic Treaty as a legally binding instrument; one which will empower people with disabilities and help remove the physical and social barriers they face.



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Thursday, 14<sup>th</sup> December 2006