



Fédération Internationale des Associations contre la Lèpre
International Federation of Anti-Leprosy Associations

234 Blythe Road
London, W14 0HJ, UK

Tel: +44 (0)20 7602 6925
Fax: +44 (0)20 7371 1621
E-mail: ilep@ilep.org.uk
Web site: www.ilep.org.uk

May 3rd Milestone for United Nations Disability Convention

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities adopted by the General Assembly on 13th December 2006, has now been ratified by more than 20 countries, which means that on 3rd May 2008 the Convention will “enter into force”.

What does this mean?

The Convention's entry into force will finally ensure that countries will no longer be allowed to relegate persons with disabilities to the margins of society. Governments that have ratified it will be legally bound to treat persons with disabilities as subjects of the law with clearly defined rights. Countries that ratify the treaty agree to enact laws and other measures to improve disability rights, and also abolish legislation, customs and practices that discriminate against persons with disabilities.

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 full text is available at www.un.org/disabilities.

This important new Convention will have far reaching consequences for all people with disabilities, including those affected by leprosy.

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 very much hope that ILEP Members and the many thousands of leprosy affected persons they work with, will do everything they can to publicise and promote the existence of this historic Treaty as a legally binding instrument; one which will empower people with disabilities and help remove the physical and social barriers they face. It is likely in the coming year that there will be meetings and conferences promoting the implementation of the Convention and I would encourage ILEP Members and their partners among Disabled Peoples' Organisations and organisations of people affected by leprosy, to engage in these to ensure that people who face stigma, discrimination and leprosy-related disabilities are always included.

Douglas Soutar,
ILEP General Secretary,
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