

New Zealand Permanent Mission to the United Nations



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UNGA Third Committee

Item 67 e Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

**Statement by
New Zealand on behalf of
Canada, Australia and New Zealand**

28 October 2008

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I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

In 2008, the United Nations celebrates the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. It is fitting that this year also marks the entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Convention represents the most significant recent elaboration of the international bill of rights and joins the other core international human rights treaties, and has the potential to change the lives of more than 500 million people and their families around the world. With now over 136 signatures and 41 ratifications in less than two years, the Convention has been the most quickly embraced Convention in the history of international human rights.

Canada, Australia and New Zealand wish to reaffirm our ongoing strong support for the rights of persons with disabilities and for the Convention. Having chaired the negotiations on the Convention to adoption, New Zealand now looks forward to representing the WEOG regional group on the bureau of the Conference of States Parties, and is again running a resolution on the Convention jointly with Mexico at this year's General Assembly and next year's main session of the Human Rights Council. CANZ is proud that Australia's candidate to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Professor Ronald McCallum, is standing for the inaugural election to the new treaty body on 3 November. Professor McCallum is the only non-EU candidate standing in the WEOG and has a valuable perspective to bring, shaped by his experience as a person with a disability and distinguished legal background.

We look forward to the establishment of the Committee, which will be entrusted to promote the standards elaborated in the Convention. The Convention represents a compromise among States and civil society that was able to secure consensus adoption. The Committee must consolidate and strengthen this agreement over its establishment phase, and be attuned to the negotiating history of the text. The common ground is where real progress can be promoted and gains made, and this will ensure that the Convention's obligations are upheld in all States. A weighty responsibility now lies with the Committee in this regard.

The United Nations has a critical role to play in ensuring the successful establishment and implementation of the Convention. We welcome the Joint Statement of Commitment to the Convention by the UN Interagency Support Group, as well as the efforts of DESA and OHCHR in particular to support the establishment of the Conference of States Parties and the Committee. We hope other UN agencies will join the interagency support group, including UNIFEM, UN AIDS, and others, in promoting the universality of the application of the Convention. Accessibility in the United Nations remains an area for improvement. We are concerned the recent temporary renovations have not ensured that UN premises are accessible and safe for all people, including persons with disabilities. With the establishment of the Committee on the

Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Geneva, we also call upon the UN in Geneva to take urgent steps to improve accessibility there.

Accessibility is about more than just buildings and meeting rooms, though these are important. Accessibility is also about attitudes of staff and how meeting agendas are organised. It means ensuring information is always provided in an accessible format. A practical commitment to accessibility means the UN must demonstrate the principle of reasonable accommodation and supporting the needs of persons with disabilities so that they can participate fully and meaningfully in the UN system. We encourage the UN Secretary-General to help create the necessary momentum. These issues also demand urgent attention and action by States through the Fifth Committee at this year's UN General Assembly, which has the principal responsibility for the UN budget and management.

As the Convention shifts into an implementation phase, we must ensure that the momentum, cross-regional ownership, and partnership with civil society that defined the negotiations continues and endures. Sharing best practices and lessons learnt from ratification and implementation should be an important focus of States parties future work, including during the future Conferences of States Parties. In this early phase, States parties must also ensure that signatories remain closely engaged on the basis that they are working to ratify the Convention at the earliest opportunity. International cooperation and development assistance must also be marshalled to ensure the implementation of the Convention, and this is being addressed in our support for developing countries.

Mr Chair, Canada, Australia and New Zealand look forward to doing our part to make the rights of persons with disabilities a reality for all persons with disabilities around the world.