

Fourth Session of the Human Rights Council

Special Event

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Address by

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Your Excellency, Mr. President, Ambassador de Alba  
I was honoured to receive your invitation to join such a distinguished panel.

Your own and your country's dedication to the rights of persons with disabilities has been translated into the Convention we have today.

Ambassador MacKay and myself have shared many interesting observations and conversations during the Ad Hoc meetings in New York.

And I have always admired Madame Arbour's devotion and commitment to human rights, and her concern for the rights of persons with disabilities.

I am therefore, proud and honoured to be part of this event.

The drafting of the Convention started with my appointment as Special Rapporteur on Disability

and I feel privileged to have witnessed the details of that process and to have been part of it.

As Special Rapporteur for the Standard Rules for the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, I report to the Commission for Social Development.

However, I have always insisted that the rights of persons with disabilities should have a place on the agenda of the Commission on human rights—

And as such have always endeavoured to attend the meetings of the Commission and present a statement on

disability—even when it was not always easy to fit into the Commission's agenda.

It has always been my conviction that the issues of persons with disabilities belong to both agendas—the social development agenda and the human rights agenda.

The complementary relationship between these two agendas has now found expression in the brilliant document which is the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

This Convention is the result of a intensive labour—a 200-year struggle for recognition and rights that persons with disabilities have been engaged in and which the United Nations has recognized.

Throughout the past four years that I have been advocating for the rights of persons with disabilities, promoting the Standard Rules, assessing and monitoring their implementation, I have become increasingly convinced that there can be no conflict between the human rights perspective and development perspective.

It is therefore, my firm belief that both the Standard Rules and the Convention are essential to achieving the human rights for persons with disabilities.

The importance of the Convention lies in the fact that Even though it deals with the rights of persons with disabilities,  
It is a human rights instrument that protects the rights of **all persons**

For we are all **potentially temporarily abled.**

It expresses the development school of thought,  
the human rights school of thought,  
it contains the medical, social and legal perspectives,  
it deals with the humanity of all persons,

it covers the cultural aspects,  
it speaks to issues of justice and equality,  
it speaks to matters of discrimination and prejudice,  
it transcends issues of  
race,  
colour,  
gender,  
social class,  
geography,

In short,  
this is not a Convention on the rights of persons with  
disabilities only,

**This is a human rights convention.**

And as such, should sit side by side with all human rights  
conventions and treaties  
belonging equally firmly on the human rights agenda as on  
the development agenda.

What sets this treaty apart is the fact that it was drafted  
with more input from civil society,  
disabled persons organizations,  
human rights institutes,  
development and social justice organizations,  
and last but, by no means least,  
persons with disabilities themselves and their representative  
organizations.

Additionally, this treaty urges us to restructure and re-  
engineer our societies and communities  
putting into practice the disability movement's motto of  
"what's good for us is good for all".

However, having an Convention on the Rights of Persons  
with Disabilities does not mean that the rights of persons  
with disabilities have been achieved.

The reality of the lives of persons with disabilities with disabilities in the world is far more grim and gloomy than many of us would like to admit.

But I speak from experience and first-hand observation.

An international Convention that safeguards the rights of persons with disabilities will only remain a document if the lives of people with disabilities do not change on the ground

if the rights of person with disabilities are not realized at the community level where they spend their lives.

A family in Guatemala that cannot feed its children will not be able to provide rehabilitation services or assistive devices for their severely disabled child.

A Downs Syndrome child who is one of eight in a shanty town in Conakry, will not be able to receive an education in an integrated setting when there is no school for any of the children in that community.

The reality of the lives of persons with disabilities also became clear to me through the Global Survey on Government Actions on the Implementation of the Standard Rules conducted by my office and whose results were published in a report in January of this year.

Not only was it made clear through the responses of the disabled persons organizations, but more so due to the fact many disabled persons organizations in Asia and Africa did not have the resources necessary to mail back their responses to my office.

The drafting of this Convention has been expression of International Cooperation, however, it also obligates us to exercise our International Responsibility.

As signatories to this Convention we have a responsibility to ensure its implementation by working towards ensuring that the rights of every person with disabilities is realized on the ground in the community where he or she lives.

We therefore, need to make sure that our cultures, societies, communities, legislations, policies, programmes adopt and adapt the new culture that has been expressed through the Convention with its principles and its implications.

Finally, I would like to thank you once again for asking me to be part of this panel.