



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

A country that ratifies the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is legally bound to give effect to the provisions of the treaty in its domestic legal order. Ratifying countries must put in place the legislative, administrative and other measures required to implement domestically the international standards laid out in the treaty.

The Convention and its Optional Protocol entered into force on 3 May 2008. As of 17 November 2008, 41 countries have ratified the Convention, while 136 have signed it – indicating an intention to ratify in the future. At the first Conference of the States Parties, on 31 October and 3 November 2008, the countries that have ratified the Convention elected the first 12 independent experts to form the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Committee will receive periodic reports from States Parties on progress made in implementing the Convention.

The Optional Protocol to the Convention allows individuals and groups from countries that have ratified the Protocol to submit to the Committee claims alleging violation of the provisions of the Convention.

### **A Comprehensive Convention**

The Convention comprehensively addresses the various barriers preventing persons with disabilities from enjoying their human rights on an equal basis with others. The Convention establishes strong equality and non-discrimination guarantees in all areas of life. It also protects the political, civil, economic, cultural and social rights of persons with disabilities.

On the fundamental issue of accessibility, the Convention requires States to develop minimum standards on all aspects of accessibility of facilities and services open to the public. These standards touch on transportation, information and communication and other facilities and services

### **Among other things, ratifying countries are obligated to:**

- Ensure equal recognition before the law of all persons with disabilities, including the right to legal capacity, to own and inherit property, to control financial affairs and to have access to bank loans, credit and mortgages;
- Put in place laws and other measures to protect persons with disabilities from exploitation, violence and abuse;
- Promote the recovery and rehabilitation of the victim, in cases of abuse, and prosecute the culprit;
- Promote the personal mobility of persons with disabilities, including by facilitating access to mobility aids and devices;
- Ensure the right of persons with disabilities not to be deprived of their liberty because of a disability, to live independently and not be obliged to reside in a particular living arrangement;
- Ensure the right to marry and to found a family;

- Ensure the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education system, providing the required support;
- Ensure equal access to vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning;
- Provide health care and those specific health services needed because of disabilities;
- Protect the right to work of persons with disabilities, prohibit discrimination and ensure reasonable accommodation of persons with disabilities in the workplace;
- Ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy an adequate standard of living and have the right to social protection;
- Guarantee participation in political and public life and in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport.

Making changes in line with the Convention will benefit not only persons with disabilities, but all of society as well. The Convention promotes “universal design” – the design of products, environments, programmes and services usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. Elevators and ramps, for example, provide more options for everyone. Design changes that are needed to follow the letter and spirit of the Convention generate new ideas and innovations that improve life for all people.

The World Bank has found that the cost of embedding accessibility features at the time of construction of buildings is minimal. It has been shown that making buildings accessible adds less than one per cent to construction costs.

“It is actually good economics to ensure that persons with disabilities are able to live up to their potential,” said the Chief of the UN Secretariat for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Akiko Ito. “When there are no obstacles in their way, persons with disabilities are employees, entrepreneurs, consumers and taxpayers like everybody else.”

“Society is missing out on a large talent pool,” said Ms. Ito. “Persons with disabilities can contribute a wide array of expertise, skills and talents. Studies show that their job performance is as good, if not better, than the general population. High retention rates and less absenteeism more than offset fears that it is too costly to accommodate their needs in the workplace.”

“Fears that hiring persons with disabilities add significant costs to employers are overblown,” Ms. Ito added. In a 2003 survey in the United States, almost three-quarters of employers reported that employees with disabilities did not require any special accommodation at all. “Everybody is set to gain in fully integrating persons with disabilities.”