



Statement by Lena Sundh

Delivered at a Programme on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Organized by the National Federation of the Disabled – Nepal and Handicap International, 19 April 2007

Honourable Minister, Colleagues and Friends,

It is a pleasure to be with you today for the publication in Nepali of the Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities. I would like to congratulate the National Federation of the Disabled – Nepal and Handicap International for their prompt work in having this landmark document published.

As you may know, the Convention was opened for signature on 30 March. Since then 84 countries, which is likely a record for the opening for any UN treaty, have signed the Convention; 44 countries have signed the Optional Protocol and one country, Jamaica, has ratified the Convention. Twenty ratifications are required for the Convention to come into force.

Of course, OHCHR hopes to see the Government of Nepal sign the Convention soon, and my Office would like to offer the Government any assistance we can give in order to take that important step.

This Convention represents five years of unprecedented collaboration between States, the UN, civil society and national human rights institutions. However, already in the middle of the 1980s I remember being involved as a national diplomat in work on international standards to ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities. The disabilities community has been in the forefront of all of this work. You provided unwavering strength, at times fighting inertia, indifference and often open resistance, in order to achieve, by the force of the law, your legitimate aspiration for equality and justice.

This Convention illuminates both the blatant and the hidden ways in which beliefs, behaviours, practices and laws serve to deprive persons with disabilities from their entitlement to achieve their fullest personal development and to contribute, like everyone else, to the common good. By signing it, States send a strong signal to persons with and without disabilities that their governments are committed to protecting the rights of persons with disabilities, and that improved enjoyment of human rights requires action, not only promises.

OHCHR is committed to assisting the people of Nepal to ensure that the nation that you are building in this post-conflict phase is one that makes room for and respects

the rights of all peoples, especially those who have been historically marginalized, such as persons with disabilities.

I am confident that thanks to movements such as the one led by the disabilities community in creating this Convention, the aspirations for an inclusive 'New Nepal' are indeed attainable.

Thank you