



**Statement by Richard Bennett
Representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Nepal
Delivered at a Programme of the National Federation of the Disabled - Nepal
on International Day of Disabled Persons
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Honourable Speaker, distinguished guests, participants, colleagues and friends:

I am honoured to be speaking here today on the International Day of Disabled Persons. I would first like to inform you that as of 29 October, 118 countries have signed the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* - the first comprehensive human rights treaty of the 21st century, and which marks a paradigm shift in attitudes and approaches to people with disabilities; 67 countries have signed the Optional Protocol; seven countries have ratified the Convention, including India, while three countries have ratified the protocol.

This might appear impressive, considering that the Convention was opened for signature only on 30 March 2007; however, it is important to note that 20 ratifications are required for the Convention to come into force, or 13 more than we have today. OHCHR-Nepal is strongly encouraging the Government of Nepal to sign and ratify the Convention as soon as possible, and I am pleased to report that in a meeting I had with the Foreign Minister last week, she assured me that the Government is taking action in this regard.

As you may know, the theme of this year's International Day is *Decent Work for People With Disabilities*. Article 27 of the *Convention* requires State Parties to "recognize the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; including the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities".

State Parties to the Convention must safeguard and promote the realization of the right to work by taking appropriate steps, including through legislation, to, *inter alia*:

- Protect the rights of persons with disabilities, on an equal basis with others, to just and favourable conditions of work, including equal opportunities and equal remuneration for work of equal value, safe and healthy working conditions, including protection from harassment, and the redress of grievances;
- Enable persons with disabilities to have effective access to general technical and vocational guidance programmes, placement services and vocational and continuing training;
- Employ persons with disabilities in the public sector.

The majority of people with disabilities live in conditions of poverty. Access to decent work is the key to breaking that poverty trap, while the self sufficiency that work with fair pay and conditions brings enhances the dignity of the worker and contributes to the entire society and economy. To bring this about requires a commitment and a partnership between the government and the private sector. A roadmap should be designed and implemented,

building on accomplishments like the employment of deaf waiters at the Bakery Café chain since 1997 and the lessons learned from those and similar experiences.

My Office would like to offer its support to the process of preparing the groundwork for implementation of the Convention, and as a first step can make available a handbook developed by OHCHR to educate parliamentarians about the Convention, which might also be used as a general advocacy tool. The handbook is available now to download from our website (<http://nepal.ohchr.org>) and hard copies should arrive in our office later this week. To get copies, or for more information, please contact our Public Information and Outreach Unit.

I think it is important today to note that disabilities include not only visible physical disabilities but also less obvious conditions, such as deafness and mental illness. According to the 2001 census, 24.6 percent of disabled persons named deafness as their disability while 12.7 percent were considered to have a mental disability. Because they are not visible, this latter group of disabilities are often overlooked or, worse, hidden from public view due to stigmatization. The articles in the Convention apply equally to all disabilities.

Since April 2006, this country's political leaders have been promising to create a new Nepal which will treat every individual equally, be they from the historically dominant or the historically marginalized groups, be they man or woman. Disabled persons and their organizations continue to press for these promises to be translated into actions. OHCHR-Nepal is committed to assisting the leaders, the human rights institutions, including NHRC, and the people of Nepal ensure that the nation 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 people with disabilities.

Once again, thank you for inviting me here today.