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Empowering people with disabilities will help battle against poverty – UN officials



Andrew Kwok, born with cerebral palsy and unable to walk

3 December 2010 – [Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon and the United Nations human rights chief have called on governments to do more to support people with disabilities, stressing that they play a vital role in efforts to reach the globally agreed anti-poverty targets by their 2015 deadline.

In a [message](#) marking the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, Mr. Ban urged governments to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and to integrate the needs of this group with their pursuit of the anti-poverty targets known as the Millennium Development Goals ([MDGs](#)).

“People with disabilities account for roughly 20 per cent of those living in poverty in developing countries,” he noted. “Worldwide, they suffer high rates of unemployment and often lack access to adequate education and healthcare. In many societies, there are simply no provisions made for this group and they end up living in isolation, disconnected from their own communities.”

This year’s theme for the Day is “Keeping the promise: mainstreaming disability in the Millennium Development Goals.” Mr. Ban recalled that among the promises made by world leaders at the high-level MDG Summit in September was a commitment to improve the lives of persons with disabilities.

“On this International Day, let us recognize that the battles against poverty, disease and discrimination will not be won without targeted laws, policies and programmes that empower this group.

“Let us pledge to keep the promise of the goals alive in the community of persons with disabilities. And let us include them not only as beneficiaries, but as valued agents of change in our five-year push to reach the Goals by the internationally agreed deadline of 2015,” said Mr. Ban.

The Secretary-General’s call for governments to give more support to the 650 million people with disabilities worldwide was echoed by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, who said it made no sense that governments did not do more to bring such a large, potentially productive group in from the sidelines.

“Efforts to reduce poverty – and to achieve that Millennium Development Goals, which include halving poverty – will be severely hampered if efforts to improve the situation of hundreds of millions of people living with disabilities are not pursued with vigour,” she [said](#).

Ms. Pillay praised the fast adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, saying it had been signed and ratified faster than any other treaty in history.

“The Convention makes it clear that persons with disabilities have the same rights as everyone else. This is not a matter of charity, or choice. They are entitled to the same rights to key services such as health and education, the same right to earn a living and not to be discriminated against in any way,” she said.

The Convention came into force in May 2008, as the first new human rights convention of the 21st Century. It has so far been signed by 147 States and ratified by 96. This has allowed the formation of a broad, 18-member committee to monitor States’ records against their obligations under the Convention

The annual observance of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities on 3 December was established in 1981 during the International Year for Disabled Persons. The Day aims to promote a better understanding of disability issues with a focus on the rights of people with disabilities and the gains that could be derived from integrating them better in every aspect of the political, social, economic and cultural life of their communities.

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