

## Seeking to advance rights of people with disabilities, UN treaty review starts in New York



Participants at the Fifth Session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. UN Photo/Evan Schneider

12 September 2012 – Hundreds of advocates and experts on disability, as well as Government delegates, have gathered at UN Headquarters for the start of the Fifth Session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which will have a special focus on women and children.

“It is our responsibility as members of the international community and citizens of our own countries to bring about changes to more than one billion persons with disabilities worldwide,” the UN Under Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Wu Hongbo, said in a news release.

“There is no development when so many people are without equal opportunities and excluded from society,” he added.

The Conference of States Parties – the largest international meeting on disability issues – is held each year to exchange experience and ideas for implementation of the Convention, which was adopted in December 2006. There are currently 119 States that have ratified or acceded to the Convention – these States Parties are required to promote full equality and participation of persons with disabilities in society.

Ending on Friday, the theme of the Conference is ‘Making the CRPD count for Women and Children.’ It brings together hundreds of delegates from Governments, UN system organizations, academia and civil society, including representatives of organizations of persons with disabilities, to review good practices and challenges in the implementation of the Convention, especially for groups with vulnerabilities.

“Women and children with disabilities face aggravated forms of discrimination and other forms of obstacles in life,” said the Conference’s President, Mårten Grunditz, the Permanent Representative of Sweden to the UN. “So much talent is wasted – but opportunities can be seized and created. Let’s make it count for them – because it’s right and it’s smart.”

“Albert Einstein had a learning disability and didn’t speak until age three. Ludwig van Beethoven was deaf. Helen Keller was deaf and blind. These stories tell the same simple truth: disability is by no means an inability,” added Mr. Wu. “These individuals, just like many others, including the incredible athletes of the recent Paralympic Games, achieved greatness and demonstrated that by breaking down barriers, and with the right opportunities, exceptional things are possible.”

The CRPD entered into force in May 2008. It followed decades of work by the United Nations to change attitudes and approaches to persons with disabilities, and takes a new height the movement from viewing persons with disabilities as ‘objects’ of charity, medical treatment and social protection towards viewing persons with disabilities as ‘subjects’ with rights, capable of claiming those rights and making decisions for their lives based on their free and informed consent as well as being active members of society.

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