

UNION INTERPARLEMENTAIRE



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CHEMIN DU POMMIER  
CASE POSTALE 330  
1218 LE GRAND-SACONNEX / GE

Socialudvalget, Det Politisk-Økonomiske  
Udvalg (2. samling)  
SOU alm. del - Bilag 63, PØU alm. del - Bilag 13  
Offentligt

TELEPHONE (41.22) 919 41 50  
FAX (41.22) 919 41 60  
E-MAIL [postbox@mail.ipu.org](mailto:postbox@mail.ipu.org)

Geneva, 5 December 2007

**HANDBOOK FOR PARLIAMENTARIANS ON THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS  
OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AND ITS OPTIONAL PROTOCOL**

Dear Madam Speaker,  
Dear Mr. Speaker,

I am pleased to send you the latest Handbook for Parliamentarians published by the IPU, together with the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The Handbook was recently launched in Geneva, at the 117<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly. Entitled "*From exclusion to equality: Realizing the rights of persons with disabilities*", it looks at the new Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol, highlighting its key provisions and the manner in which parliaments can contribute to the ratification and implementation of this important international human rights instrument.

Disability affects 650 million people directly and up to 2 billion indirectly (when caregivers and family members are included). Only 25 per cent of all countries currently have a legal framework to protect the rights of persons with disabilities so that they may enjoy equal access to education, work, and health care, as well as to less tangible but equally critical rights like the right to vote or the right to make one's own medical decisions.

The new Convention will hopefully encourage more countries either to rethink or establish the appropriate legal frameworks. For the Convention to enter into force, 20 ratifications will be required. To date, seven countries have ratified the Convention and 118 have signed it. I take this opportunity to invite you to consider holding a debate on the Convention in your parliament with a view to facilitating its ratification and eventual implementation.

I am enclosing two copies of the Handbook in the hope that you will wish to share them with your colleagues. For your information, the Handbook will be published in French, Spanish and Arabic in the spring of next year.

I also take this opportunity to inform you that, subject to funding, the IPU is currently exploring the possibility of organizing a series of regional workshops for MPs next year. Please let me know if your parliament would be interested in hosting one of these events.

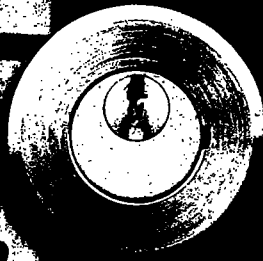
We hope you will enjoy reading this Handbook. Please do not hesitate to let us know if you require additional copies.

**Note fra udvalgssekretariatet:  
Håndbogen er fremlagt til udlån og kan  
rekvireres ved henvendelse til Sherie  
Falding på 5544.**

Yours sincerely,

Anders B. Johnsson  
Secretary General

# disabilities



HANDBOOK FOR PARLIAMENTARIANS

Nº 14 - 2007

# Acknowledgements

The Handbook was jointly prepared by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

**Principal authors:** Andrew Byrnes (University of New South Wales, Australia), Alex Conte (University of Southampton, United Kingdom), Jean-Pierre Gonnot (UN-DESA), Linda Larsson (UN-DESA), Thomas Schindlmayr (UN-DESA), Nicola Shepherd (UN-DESA), Simon Walker (OHCHR), and Adriana Zarraluqui (OHCHR).

**Other contributors:** Graham Edwards (Member of Parliament, Australia), Anda Filip (IPU), Anders B. Johnsson (IPU), Axel Leblois (Global Initiative for Inclusive ICTs), Janet Lord (BlueLaw LLP), Alessandro Motter (IPU), James Mwandha (former Member of Parliament, Uganda), Kaj Nordquist (former Member of Parliament, Sweden), Mona Pare (Carleton University, Canada), and Hendrietta Bogopane-Zulu (Member of Parliament, South Africa).

In addition, Inclusion International, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Bank, and the World Health Organization (WHO) provided initial guidance and comments on the text.

**Editorial consultant:** Marilyn Achiron

**Design and layout:** Kal Honey, Eye-to-Eye Design (Brampton, Canada)

**Printing:** SRO-Kundig (Geneva, Switzerland)

# Foreword

Persons with disabilities remain amongst the most marginalized in every society. While the international human rights framework has changed lives everywhere, persons with disabilities have not reaped the same benefits. Regardless of a country's human rights or economic situation, they are generally the last in line to have their human rights respected. Being denied the opportunities that would enable them to be self-sufficient, most persons with disabilities resort to the kindness or charity of others. In recent years, there was a growing realization throughout the world that continuing to deny 650 million individuals their human rights was no longer acceptable. It was time to act.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is the response of the international community to the long history of discrimination, exclusion and dehumanization of persons with disabilities. It is historic and groundbreaking in many ways, being the fastest negotiated human rights treaty ever and the first of the twenty-first century. The Convention is the result of three years of negotiations involving civil society, Governments, national human rights institutions and international organizations. After adopting the Convention in the United Nations General Assembly in December 2006, a record number of countries demonstrated their commitment to respecting the rights of persons with disabilities by signing the Convention and Optional Protocol when they opened for signature in March 2007.

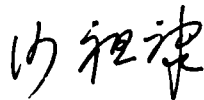
The Convention ensures that the world's largest minority enjoys the same rights and opportunities as everyone else. It covers the many areas where persons with disabilities have been discriminated against including access to justice; participation in political and public life; education; employment; freedom from torture, exploitation and violence, as well as freedom of movement. Under the Optional Protocol, individuals of States parties to the Protocol who allege violations of their rights, and who have exhausted national remedies, can seek redress from an independent international body.

The Convention is long overdue. It is over 25 years since the 1981 International Year of Disabled Persons brought global attention to the issues affecting persons with disabilities. In the intervening years, many

societies have moved away from considering persons with disabilities as objects of charity and pity, by acknowledging that society itself is disabling. The Convention embodies this attitudinal change, and is a major step towards altering the perception of disability and ensuring that societies recognize that all people must have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

This Handbook is the outcome of cooperation between the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the Inter-Parliamentary Union. The preparation of the Handbook benefited from an editorial review board consisting of parliamentarians, academics and practitioners – many of whom are persons with disabilities.

Parliaments and parliamentarians have a key role to play in promoting and protecting human rights. This Handbook aims to assist parliamentarians and others in efforts to realize the Convention so that persons with disabilities can achieve the transition from exclusion to equality. The Handbook seeks to raise awareness of the Convention and its provisions, promote an appreciation of disability concerns, and assist parliaments in understanding the mechanisms and frameworks needed to translate the Convention into practice. By providing examples and insights, it is hoped that the Handbook will serve as a useful tool for parliamentarians to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities all over the world.



**Sha Zakang**  
Under-Secretary-General  
Department of Economic  
and Social Affairs



**Louise Arbour**  
United Nations  
High Commissioner for  
Human Rights



**Anders B. Johansson**  
Secretary General  
Inter-Parliamentary Union

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