

Ratification of UN treaty will continue to drive change: Powell

At last disability is to be recognized as a matter of fundamental human rights, says CACL

Friday, March 12, 2010 -- Camille Jensen

Community Living Ontario executive director Keith Powell says Canada's ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities yesterday marks a historic moment that will continue to drive change within the province and its communities for decades to come.

Community Living Ontario and the 117 local Community Living associations are praising the Government of Canada for its leadership in signing the convention in New York March 11.

The act confirms Canada's role as a leader on disability issues and means that all Canadians can and must stand up and play a role in making communities inclusive by welcoming all people, says Powell.

"(This international treaty) will continue to shift our understanding of disability from a deficit or problem located within the person to an understanding of the combination of environmental and attitudinal barriers that a person faces," said Powell in a news release.

Powell notes the achievement comes almost exactly one year after the Ontario government closed the doors to its last three remaining institutions. The ratification of the convention marks another significant step in the journey of people who have an intellectual disability towards enjoying their full human rights and inclusion in society.

The convention is an international human rights instrument of the UN intended to protect the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities. Parties to the convention are required to promote, protect and ensure the full enjoyment of human rights by persons with disabilities, and to ensure that they enjoy full equality under the law.

President of the Canadian Association for Community Living Bendina Miller and Minister of Foreign Affairs Lawrence Cannon participated in the ratification ceremony at the UN Headquarters in New York.

In a news release issued by the Canadian association, the organization states that ratification is Canada's declaration to Canadians and the international community that at last disability is to be recognized as a matter of fundamental human rights – at home and internationally.

"Across the country, Canadians with disabilities and their families are celebrating," said Miller.

Michael Bach, the Canadian association's executive vice-president, highlights the important role Canada playing in developing the convention. He says many concepts in the document reflect a Canadian perspective such as inclusive education, living in the community and supported decision making.

The convention is also unique for the way it was developed. It is the first time in UN history that people affected by a treaty were actively engaged in the development of its text. According to Bach, the convention is informed by the lived experience of people with disabilities and their families.

"The convention was influenced by a Canadian perspective and is a document that all Canadians should be proud of," he said.

Canada was the 82nd country to ratify the convention after being one of the earliest signatories of the document, adopted by the UN General Assembly December 2006.

For more information about the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, go to <http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml>

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