

April 23, 2013

**Comment Delivered in Person to the National Council on Disability
At its Quarterly Meeting
By David Morrissey, Executive Director**

Thank you for providing this opportunity for public comment. My name is David Morrissey and I am the Executive Director of the United States International Council on Disabilities (USICD). USICD's mission is to promote the rights and full participation of persons with disabilities through United States global engagement and foreign affairs. Our membership includes both individual advocates and disability organizations from the local and national level who share a vision of a world where the equal rights of persons with disabilities are protected and advanced, where the capacities and talents of persons with disabilities are celebrated and elevated, and where people with disabilities come together across borders as a global disability community.

Since its adoption by the United Nations in 2006, and even prior to that during the drafting process, USICD has been at the forefront of efforts to bridge the United States with the world community through the disability treaty, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). As a pioneering nation in the area of disability rights, the United States must join our global neighbors at the table regarding the human rights, equality, and nondiscrimination of people with disabilities. Enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act provided significant inspiration to disability rights movements around the world and contributed to the ongoing energy of the American disability movement today working toward better inclusion in the classroom, the workplace, and in the media. As a result, the global disability rights movement has identified the United States as a world leader on disability. And yet we risk significant isolation and loss of this leadership if we fail to join the other 129 nations that have ratified the CRPD.

USICD was profoundly inspired to conduct a campaign for U.S. ratification with the approval of the treaty in the General Assembly under President George W. Bush in 2006 and the signing of the treaty ordered by President Obama in 2009. As the President said, "Disability rights aren't just civil rights to be enforced here at home; they're universal rights to be recognized and promoted around the world."

Today USICD is joined by over 350 local, state and national organizations calling for U.S. ratification of the CRPD. The Obama Administration prepared a proposal for ratification that was received with bipartisan enthusiasm in the Senate last year upon its transmittal. And 21 major veteran organizations, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the faith community and hundreds of disability organizations have endorsed it.

Yet we have seen a vocal effort arise wielding misinformation and fear tactics, meant to promote a narrow policy agenda. It wishes to kill the bipartisanship that disability rights legislation has always enjoyed in the United States, it seeks to cast the ratification of the CRPD as jeopardizing United States sovereignty, it seeks to divorce people with disabilities from understanding and experiencing parenthood and parental interests. As the hearing in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on these issues found last year, these concerns are unfounded and a majority of the Senate voted to approve ratification. The necessary super-majority was missed by only five votes, and bipartisan leaders have pledged to bring the issue back for another vote.

The disability community looks to the National Council on Disability to assist with moving this forward. NCD can call on the U.S. Senate and the Foreign Relations Committee to consider the ratification through hearings and the

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development of a resolution of ratification. NCD can offer itself as an expert resource to the Senate process. NCD can monitor the Senate activities for their accessibility to all disability stakeholders. NCD can engage in a national education effort to dispel myths about the treaty and to promote U.S. engagement with the world disability community. It is an appropriate role for NCD to uncover the facts of ratification of the treaty and disseminate these facts. And dispelling myths about the CRPD has the dual benefit of dispelling myths about disability and heightening awareness that nondiscrimination, inclusion, and full participation by people with disabilities is possible in society—the vision of the CRPD.

By ratifying the CRPD, the United States can share the American experience of protecting and promoting disability rights with the world. Our influence is sorely needed. The world's people with disabilities look to the United States on this issue. Hear these voices calling for U.S. ratification:

From Nigeria: “Should US ratify the convention, it will have ripple effects in my country, where the government is foot-dragging to sign the national disability bill into law.” Ayeni B. Oluropo, International Republican Institute, Abuja, Nigeria

From Guatemala: “Ratification of the CPRD in the USA could give the necessary impulse with respect to the human rights of people with disabilities in Guatemala, where these rights are constantly violated.” Juan José Mendoza Muñoz, Guatemala

From Mongolia: “Many countries see US action in human rights as an example. We, persons with disabilities, always take examples from the United States. If the US ratifies the CRPD that will have a huge impact in other countries and will facilitate our advocacy.” Ya.Avirmed, Aivuun NGO for Persons with Disabilities, Ulaanbaatar city, Mongolia

From Trinidad: “US disability rights laws are the standard bearer and the fact that the United States Senate is taking steps to ratify the CRPD is further evidence of the importance of this treaty.” Debbie McKell, Trinidad and Tobago Paralympic

And from India: “The impact of CRPD's ratification on the US foreign policy and in particular development cooperation policies would [...] benefit millions of disabled people the world over.” Javed Abidi, Chairperson, Disabled People's International (DPI), Delhi, India

These statements have been collected through USICD's friendship and solidarity with Disabled Peoples' International, DPI. NCD has for many years been connected to USICD's monitoring of international affairs and activities with DPI and the world community. NCD must continue to support the engagement of Americans with Disabilities with the world disability community by supporting nongovernmental, civil society organizations led by people with disabilities to participate in these important international dialogues and networks. Facilitating U.S. ratification furthers this goal, but also draws real benefit for Americans with disabilities.

By ratifying the CRPD, the U.S. will offer decades of honed technical expertise to reduce barriers globally and ensure that Americans who travel and study abroad have the same access they enjoy here. Americans travelers, students, and veterans with disabilities encounter constant barriers and discrimination abroad. BlazeSports International empowers athletes with disabilities to compete around the world, and they witness daily the challenges. Their leadership wrote to us in support of U.S. ratification:

“American athletes with disabilities travel extensively to countries all over the world. They must compete at internationally sanctioned events to earn world rankings or meet qualifying standards to be eligible for world

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championships and Paralympic Games. Discriminatory policies and inaccessible physical environments are abundant in many other countries. American athletes are faced with potential injuries, health set backs, and financial losses because hotels, restaurants, markets, taxis, and public transportation are inaccessible in many cities hosting international competitions.”

The United States must be at the table as countries work to modernize into an accessible and equitable society. As an esteemed council of Americans with disabilities, NCD must make a strong statement in support of ratification and join the advocacy of over 350 disability groups in the United States conducting factual education about the treaty so that misinformation will be shattered for truth.

Thank you.