

**International Day of Families**  
**15 May 2007**  
**“Families and Persons with Disabilities”**

*Background Note*

In resolution 47/237 of 20 September 1993, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed that 15 May of every year shall be observed as the International Day of Families. The theme for the 2007 observance is ‘Families and Persons with Disabilities’, which emphasizes the importance of family with respect to the well-being of persons with disabilities.

The impetus for this year’s theme is the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol, which was adopted on 13 December 2006 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, and was opened for signature on 30 March 2007. On that day, there were 82 signatories to the Convention, 44 signatories to the Optional Protocol, and one ratification of the Convention. This is the highest number of signatories in history to a UN Convention on its opening day. It is the first comprehensive human rights treaty of the 21st century and is the first human rights convention to be open for signature by regional integration organizations.

Family takes a significant place within the Convention. In its Preamble, the Convention reconfirms that the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State. It also states that persons with disabilities and their family members should receive the necessary protection and assistance to enable families to contribute towards the full and equal enjoyment of the rights of persons with disabilities.

In Article 8, entitled “Awareness Raising”, States Parties agreed to undertake to adopt immediate, effective and appropriate measures to, among other things, raise awareness throughout society, including at the family level, regarding persons with disabilities, and to foster respect for the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities;

Article 23 of the Convention, entitled “Respect for home and the family”, focuses on family and family issues. Here, States Parties agreed to:

- take measures to eliminate discrimination against persons with disabilities in all matters relating to marriage, family, parenthood and relationships;
- ensure the rights and responsibilities of persons with disabilities with regard to children;
- ensure that children with disabilities have equal rights with respect to family life;
- ensure that a child with disabilities shall not be separated from his or her family against their will, except when, subject to laws and judicial review, it is determined necessary for the best interests of the child; and

- undertake every effort, when the immediate family is unable to care for a child with disabilities, to provide alternative care within the wider family or, failing that, within the community in a family setting.

For many persons with disabilities, their family has been, and remains, a source of empowerment. For others, their family has perhaps been overprotective, restricting their growth as individuals. Tragically, for others still, their family has viewed them with stigma or shame, and has even become a source of abuse and neglect.

Society has a responsibility to persons with disabilities and their families. The community, as well as local and national governments should assist families to empower fully their members with disabilities and to provide them the necessary support to flourish as individuals.

***Sources:***

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, accessed at <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/conventioninfo.htm>

United Nations Enable Website: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/>

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