



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF  
BULGARIA  
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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2018 International Day of Persons with Disabilities - 3 December, CR 4, UNHQ, "Opening Session"

H.E. Mr. Georgi Panayotov, Permanent Representative of Bulgaria to the UN

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Madame President,

Dear Chair,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, allow me to express my appreciation for the work of the organizers of this event, which has turned into tradition for marking today's occasion. December 3rd 1992 was the first time we celebrated the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Looking back, we can now perceive this date as a benchmark that gave a new impetus to our efforts to foster the Rights of people with Disabilities. I think we can all agree that in the period of over 26 years, we have made significant advancement in this field of human rights. Undoubtedly, the most notable achievement being the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – a human rights instrument that has been ratified by 177 state parties while the number is increasing every year. Today, we have all come to agree that we need to continue working for the full integration and effective inclusion of Persons with Disabilities into society.

Last year, when I had the privilege to address this same panel, in my capacity of upcoming President of the Conference of States Parties to the CRPD, I mentioned that I am determined to advance further the rights of persons with disabilities by promoting the full implementation of the Convention. If you would allow me, I would like to take a couple of minutes to mention some examples of what we have achieved during our time in the Bureau as Presidency. However, before starting I would like to acknowledge that there is still much left to be done in attaining our commitment to leave no one behind.

In the period 2017-2018, Bulgaria played a key role in the preparation, organisation and conduct of the 10th and 11th Sessions of the Conference. The full and effective participation of all stakeholders (about 1,300 participants in each session), incl. states, the UN system, human rights defenders, civil society and many others had a big impact and contributed to the significant

success of the Sessions. Persons with disabilities and their representative organisations, on the initiative of the Bureau and its Bulgaria Presidency, were actively involved in all stages of the preparation and realisation of the Conference, in accordance with the principles of the Convention on the Participation of Persons with Disabilities.

The 10th and 11th Sessions of the Conference were defined by both Member States and civil society as some of the most inclusive so far. The Bureau has strengthened the human rights-based approach to disability and has defined once again the Conference as the largest global forum on the rights of persons with disabilities where all stakeholders exchange ideas, policies and best practices on different aspects of the Convention. This is instrumental for its full implementation and for improving the lives of over a billion persons with disabilities worldwide and ensuring their inclusion in society on an equal basis with others. The deliberations at the Conference contributed to strengthening the realization of the rights of persons with disabilities on the ground, even though there is still much more to achieve for the full implementation of the CRPD around the world.

I would also like to mention that during the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU in the first half of 2018, the topic of „Equal rights of people with disabilities” was on top of the social agenda. The result on this topic during our Presidency was the adoption of a Progress Report on the so-called European Accessibility Act.

**Dear colleagues,**

During this year’s participation of Bulgaria’s youth delegates, one of them mentioned, that as a visually challenged person he does not consider the UNHQ as best equipped for persons with disabilities. We still need to work on improving the building’s premises, providing accessibility for everyone who wishes to visit us. Only then, could we lead by example and provide equal participation in the work of the UN. This is another reason why my country has joined the Office of the PGA in her initiative to establish a Steering Committee on Accessibility. Furthermore, I am convinced that we all agree that persons with disabilities must, themselves, be able and participate in all discussions taking place here.

**Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,**

As President of the Conference of States Parties to the CRPD for 2017-2018 Bulgaria aimed at ensuring that full inclusion and effective participation of persons with disabilities in the decision-making on global level becomes a common practice, while trying to implement the same model on national level. Thus, we try to reaffirm our commitment to the rights of persons with disabilities, which remains high on our agenda.

**Thank you!**