

Speaking Notes

for

the Honourable Carla Qualtrough,
Minister of Public Services and Procurement
and Accessibility

for

Round Table 3

Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Society through
Participation in Cultural Life, Recreation, Leisure and
Sport

June 13, 2019

Good afternoon,

It's a pleasure to be here, I'm honoured to be a part of such an interesting and diverse group of panelists.

Inclusion encompasses many elements and touches a number of facets of our lives – and is at the heart of my work as Canada's federal Minister responsible for Accessibility.

As a person with a disability, I was born into a world that was not built for me and did not take my needs into consideration. Out of necessity I would become a problem solver, a creative thinker, and an innovator.

I grew up with the very real understanding that my whole life people were going to make assumptions about what I could and could not do.

I learned from my parents that I had the right to be accommodated.

I learned from my exposure to Paralympic sport that we could design systems that were inclusive from the beginning.

I can tell you that if it were not for sport and the Paralympic movement, I would not be where I am today.

It shed a new light on how I saw the world, and my place in it. It put me in an environment where the playing field was levelled before the competition even began.

I travelled the world and was exposed to incredible demonstrations of ability and incredible incidents of discrimination.

As a human rights lawyer, I became frustrated in having to wait until people were discriminated against before we could help them.

And then Prime Minister Trudeau came knocking and gave me a chance to do something about it as Canada's first ever Minister responsible for persons with disabilities.

PAUSE

Today, I would like to focus on how our systems, including our sport systems, need to be designed in order to ensure inclusion from the outset.

And the importance of access to quality sport and recreation opportunities are for children with disabilities.

And finally, I'll focus on is how sport can be used as a driver for broader social change.

PAUSE

In Canada our approach to inclusive systems has evolved in 2 key ways.

We are framing our public policy discourse in human rights. By this I mean the rights of full citizenship, and the civic, political and economic participation of our citizens with disabilities. We are moving beyond the practice of relying on individual accommodation to address discrimination, and are moving towards inclusion.

We are also moving beyond the mantra of “Nothing about us, without us” to “Nothing Without Us”, because everything is about us.

These are the foundational principles of Canada's first ever federal accessibility legislation, the Accessible Canada Act, which is set to receive Royal Assent next week.

These principles are also reflected in the approach we've taken to our sport system, which is guided by the Canadian Sport Policy. This policy challenges all

stakeholders involved to open sport to all Canadians. It incorporates a disability lens, which envisions the full and active participation of persons with disabilities in sport and recreation.

PAUSE

Inclusion and access to sport opportunities are critical. In fact, this is a right under the United Nations CRPD.

But when it comes to adaptive leisure and inclusive activities for Canadian children with disabilities, parents and youth often do not know how or where to find information.

To address this need, there is a free app that was created in Montreal at McGill University called “Jooay” (Jouer).

Jooay helps children with disabilities and their families locate sport and recreation opportunities they like, that are nearby, accessible, and adapted to their needs and abilities.

And when the transition from recreation to high performance sport occurs, our government is right there supporting Canadian athletes. We fund Canadian sport organizations to deliver programs, services and infrastructure projects that encourage the participation

and development of athletes with disabilities in sport, as well as providing funds directly to Canadian high performance para-sport athletes who are preparing for and competing in international competitions.

Hosting sport events like the Paralympic Games and Special Olympics not only inspire the next generation of athletes, but they challenge perceptions of persons with a disability.

PAUSE

As I mentioned earlier, participating in the Paralympics was a transformational experience that showed me the power of sport to change attitudes and advance positive social change.

We know the impact sport has on health and well-being, but we shouldn't overlook the benefit to community and social development. In fact, I would submit that sport can be effectively used to advance a broad arrange of social policy objectives. In Canada, we use sport to advance indigenous reconciliation, to support youth at risk, to empower our veterans, and to engage refugees and new Canadians in our communities. And of course I could not overlook the opportunity to remind us how powerful a tool sport is to change perceptions about what persons with a disability can do.

Its application is wide-ranging, from the Social Development Goals, like SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), to the CRPD, like Article 6 on women and children.

We also know that data is critical to demonstrating the ways that sport can advance broader social development goals – and more data is needed in this area. I am looking forward to the results of the UNESCO Kazan Action plan, which takes a science-based approach to the role of sport as an important enabler of sustainable development and peace.

PAUSE

I am very proud of the work being done in Canada and internationally to move forward towards a more inclusive world.

This being said, while it's clear that we have made significant progress, more work needs to be done.

Sport gives us a common language for driving social change and breaking down barriers.

I look forward to learning more from the esteemed panelists at this table.

Thank you.

-30-