

13 December 2006

**Statement of H.E. Ms. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa,  
President of the 61st Session of the General Assembly,  
at the Adoption of the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of  
the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities**

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The General Assembly is about to make another important step towards the protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all. Today, we will adopt, by consensus, the landmark convention on the rights of persons with disabilities.

I would like to first thank H.E. Don MacKay, the Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities, and, the other members of the Committee for their hard work and dedication.

I would also like to thank the many NGOs and persons with disabilities who have been deeply involved throughout the process. Their participation is greatly appreciated.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

From today, all Member States have committed to promoting and protecting the human rights, freedoms and dignity of all persons with disabilities. We have now reached a global consensus: the disabled are entitled to the full range of civil rights that those without disabilities enjoy. To fully implement this historic agreement we also require a change in cultural attitudes towards the disabled.

In the past, mainstream society has tended to act out of a culture of pity, rather than embrace and celebrate human difference. Too often, people with disabilities have had to manage their own disability, as well as their relative "invisibility" to society and policymakers. They have tended to be denied equal access to those basic rights and fundamental freedoms that most of us take for granted. This marginalization has been particularly acute for women and children.

There are over six hundred and fifty million disabled people in the world. Most live in developing countries. Today, we will send a clear message of solidarity to them. By re-affirming the dignity of all humankind, we recognize that all societies stand to benefit from empowering this important community.

The disabled do not see themselves as being limited in life by their circumstances, so neither should we. Going forwards then, we must respect people with disabilities as equals, exercising the same fundamental rights under the law.

The adoption of this Convention is a great opportunity to celebrate the emergence of comprehensive guidelines the world so urgently needs. It is an opportunity to reaffirm our universal commitment to the rights and dignity of all people without discrimination. The Convention can also provide the much needed impetus for wider cultural changes in the way that the world perceives disabled people.

I look forward to the full implementation of the Convention by Member States, with the involvement of all concerned parties. In particular, the NGOs and civil society groups whose energy, compassion and willingness to work in the spirit of cooperation greatly contributed to the final agreement.

Thank you.