

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF FAMILIES**

**15 May 2007**

The theme for this year's International Day of Families is "Families and Persons with Disabilities".

For many persons with disabilities, their family has been, and remains, a source of empowerment. For others, however, 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.

In December 2006, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, the first human rights treaty of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. 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 protection and assistance so that families can contribute towards the full and equal enjoyment of the rights of persons with disabilities.

In Article 23 of the Convention, Governments agreed to protect persons with disabilities against discrimination in matters relating to marriage, relationships and the family. They also agreed to ensure the equal rights of children with disabilities with respect to family life, and to ensure that children with disabilities are not separated from their families against their will except when necessary for the best interests of the child. Should the immediate family be unable to care for a child with disabilities, Governments agreed to undertake every effort to provide alternative care within the wider family or, failing that, within the community in a family setting.

Society has a responsibility to persons with disabilities and their families. On this International Day of Families, let us dedicate ourselves to enabling the family, the most basic unit of society, to fulfill its role in ensuring that persons with disabilities enjoy full human rights and dignity, and flourish as individuals.