

Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Speech by Bert Koenders, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

- It's a great pleasure and an honour to address this important conference of states parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- I'm also especially pleased since yesterday my own country, the Netherlands, deposited its instruments of ratification of the Convention at the office of the Secretary-General of the UN, after a long process of national preparations.
- We're now in the twilight zone of thirty days between ratification and entry into force. So although we're not quite there yet, I trust this is enough to justify me taking the floor here this morning
- It took us almost ten years to ratify the Convention. And you might ask why. The main reason is that, once ratified, many provisions of human rights treaties are directly applicable to the domestic legal order. And I think that is the importance of what we are discussing.
- By ratifying the Convention, the Netherlands is now making clear that people with disabilities are full members of society and that nobody can be excluded. This may seem self-

evident, but all of you know this is not the case. If the long preparation process has shown anything, it is that people with disabilities still face too many barriers, both literally and metaphorically.

- We can't take away disabilities. But we *can* work together to create societies that make life easier for all those people that have disabilities.
 - Now it's time to implement the Convention. In the Netherlands, we will do this in close cooperation with all stakeholders, including representative organisations, employers and municipalities.
 - We need to stimulate local and private initiatives as much as possible. And people with disabilities need to shape the agenda themselves.
 - Obviously, we're not starting from scratch. A lot has been achieved already. But much more needs to be done to make our society truly inclusive and accessible for everyone, just as the Convention requires us to do.
 - I'd now like to draw your attention to two particular provisions of the Convention.
 - First of all, article 32 on international cooperation.
- 'Disability and development' is a key topic these days, and rightly so. It's one of the reasons why I am in NY today. The Netherlands strongly supports the focus of 'Leave no one behind' that was chosen as the umbrella for the Sustainable

Development Goals agenda. People with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to being left behind. They are often faced with discrimination, marginalisation and limited access to labour markets, basic rights and services. Women and girls with disabilities are even more vulnerable. Their rights deserve special attention and protection.

- And as countries move up the development ladder, governments, the private sector and civil society have an even greater responsibility to include marginalised groups and the ultra-poor in their own societies. To make them actors of their own destiny. So strengthening the lobby-and-advocacy capabilities of local organisations is a key part of my government's development agenda.
- The second provision of the Convention I'd like to mention is article 11, which requires states to take all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies and natural disasters.
- Undeniably, there is a link between this provision and article 32 on international cooperation, since states facing armed conflict and crisis are often unable themselves to guarantee the rights of persons with disabilities. Let me just mention my own experience as former head of one of the UN Missions. I have seen how difficult it is, even in the system

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of the UN, to prioritize people with disabilities. We need to prioritize this.

- Ladies and gentlemen,
- The Kingdom of the Netherlands is a candidate in the UN Security Council election later this month. If elected to a temporary seat, our membership will be people-focused. Protection of civilians is a key issue for us, in particular protection of vulnerable groups who suffer most in conflicts. And that includes first and foremost persons with disabilities. We are passionate about serving the entire international community at UN level. As your partner for peace, justice and development. And I hope this will be a very fruitful meeting to further this important goal.
- Thank you.