



Psychiatric Patient Advocate Office

Bureau de l'intervention en faveur des patients des établissements psychiatriques

May 30, 2007

Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister:

Re: *The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* and its Optional Protocol

We congratulate you on Canada's standing as a signatory to the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, which recognizes the right of disabled persons to autonomy, independence and freedom of choice in making decisions impacting one's life.

Two million Canadians with disabilities, including those with mental illness, continue to struggle for full participation and equality in society. The adoption of a broad and inclusive definition of disability and reaffirmation that individuals with all types of disabilities must be given the opportunity to realize all human rights and fundamental freedoms is truly ground breaking. The *Convention* has been hailed a "paradigm shift" in attitudes and approaches to persons with disabilities and with the inclusion of an explicit, social development dimension.

The *Convention* recognizes the right of persons with disabilities to an adequate standard of living for themselves and their families. However, many individuals with disabilities live in poverty with inadequate food, clothing and housing. Poverty has a profoundly negative impact on physical and emotional health and erodes self-confidence and personal effectiveness.

Twenty percent of Canadians will personally experience a mental illness in their lifetime that may impact on their ability to work, live independently or even maintain a basic quality of life. People with mental illness can and do recover but they often require the support of their communities and government. Recovery does not readily occur in isolation. It demands an environment of hope, choice and a full complement of treatment, rehabilitation and support services. The *Convention* enshrines the right to the highest achievable standard of health and support toward the attainment and maintenance of "maximum independence, full physical, mental, social and vocational ability, and full inclusion and participation in all aspects of life."

Too many individuals with disabilities experience intolerance and discrimination which impede their habilitation or rehabilitation and reintegration into the community.

Discrimination deprives these individuals of opportunities for recovery and social inclusion and injures and diminishes their sense of self. If we are to be an inclusive, accepting and understanding community, we must have zero tolerance for discrimination arising from disability. Ratifying this *Convention* will signal to the world that Canada will protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities.

We urge you to undertake any and all federal, provincial, and territorial consultations required to move Canada forward towards ratification of this important document. We respectfully request that the consultation process be open and transparent and include members of the disability community at the provincial, territorial and national levels, including those with mental illness.

We believe that it is now time for your government to ratify the *Convention*. If I can be of assistance, please contact me at (416) 327-7004.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Simpson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

David Simpson
Director (A)

cc. Hon. Peter MacKay, Minister of Foreign Affairs
cc. Premier Dalton McGuinty