



**CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES**

March 10, 2008

Condoleezza Rice
Secretary of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Re: International Disability Rights Convention

To The Honorable Secretary Rice:

The undersigned members of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities, a coalition of national consumer, advocacy, provider and professional organizations are writing to urge your support for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This Convention will be a vital new instrument for the advancement of rights and opportunities for the more than 650 million people worldwide with disabilities. The Convention represents the culmination of an unprecedented global exchange of ideas about the universal human rights of persons with disabilities. As a world leader in establishing and enforcing the civil and legal rights of persons with disabilities, the United States must sign this Convention.

The Convention seeks the same goals as the United States had in enacting the Americans with Disabilities Act: to empower individuals with disabilities to achieve economic self-sufficiency, independent living, and inclusion and integration into all aspects of society. Our nation's leadership toward this ideal vision for our citizens has served as a beacon to people around the world and a strategy many nations have emulated. Unfortunately, throughout the six years of the discussion and drafting of this treaty, the United States generally was not present. In the latter months of the drafting process, however, the State Department did provide fundamental and valued technical assistance to the drafting committee. This sudden investment by the Administration, coupled with bipartisan support among members of Congress, brought hope to the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities that the United States would indeed sign this treaty.

To our disappointment, the United States did not join with 81 other nations in signing the treaty when it opened for signature at the United Nations on March 31, 2007. The United States did not seat a representative from our Mission to the United Nations at our country table or make any official comment or explanation at the time the Convention was adopted as to why the country of the ADA was not signing on to

the Convention. The Convention is consistent with our own laws such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the Rehabilitation Act, and numerous other provisions of our laws. The Convention establishes international standards regarding the rights and freedoms of people with disabilities and common basis for greater civic and political participation and self-sufficiency. The Convention reflects American core values and principles such as the dignity of the individual, access to justice, importance of family decision-making, and access to appropriate health care.

These standards carry a moral authority that lends weight and credibility to efforts in all parts of the world to achieve justice, equality and inclusion. The United States' support and signature on this treaty will continue our country's distinguished tradition as a world leader for people with disabilities, and not only to further our nation's vision for global democracy and human rights, but for the millions of people with disabilities and their families from the United States who travel abroad for pleasure, education, employment, business and commerce. American citizens with disabilities should also have the opportunity to benefit from a new world economy that is fully accessible to all people. The United States has an important role to play in contributing to the realization of global human rights.

We believe that abstaining from signing may jeopardize the image of the United States as a leader in democracy and disability rights. We urge you, Secretary Rice, to carry our message forward and join the other 89 signatory nations of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. We, the undersigned members of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities, are committed to our country's leadership for the rights and empowerment of the 650 million people with disabilities worldwide. It is imperative that the U.S. sign on to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Sincerely,

American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
American Association on Health and Disability
American Association of People with Disabilities
American Council of the Blind
American Foundation for the Blind
American Music Therapy Association
American Network of Community Options and Resources
APSE: The Network on Employment
Association of University Centers on Disabilities
Autism Society of America
Council for Exceptional Children
Council for Learning Disabilities
Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates
Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund
Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children
Division of International Special Education and Services of the Council for
Exceptional Children
Division of Teacher Education of the Council for Exceptional Children
Easter Seals

Goodwill Industries International
Higher Education Consortium for Special Education
Lutheran Services in America
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Head Injury Administrators
National Disability Institute
National Disability Rights Network
National Down Syndrome Congress
National Down Syndrome Society
National Multiple Sclerosis Society
National Organization on Disability
National Respite Coalition
National Spinal Cord Industry Association
Research Institute for Independent Living
TASH
The Arc of the United States
United Cerebral Palsy
United Spinal Association

cc: Mark P. Lagon, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of International
Organizations Affairs, Department of State
Department of State Advisory Committee on Persons with Disabilities
Representative Nancy Pelosi
Representative John Boehner
Representative Steny Hoyer
Senator Harry Reid
Senator Mitch McConnell
Senator Joseph Biden
Senator Edward Kennedy
Senator Tom Harkin
Representative James Langevin
Representative Tom Lantos
Representative Nita Lowey
Representative George Miller