

## **CANADA RATIFIES HISTORIC UN TREATY ON DISABILITY RIGHTS**

**New York, NY and Toronto, ON – March 11, 2010** – Today, at the United Nations headquarters in New York, Canada ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This is a historic and profound moment in our country's history. It is Canada's declaration to Canadians and the international community that disability is at last to be recognized as a matter of fundamental human rights – at home in Canada and internationally. By ratifying this first international treaty that comprehensively recognizes the rights of persons with disabilities, Canada binds our governments to its implementation. The Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL) applauds the Government of Canada for this landmark decision, and indeed all Provincial/Territorial Governments for their support in taking this step. The Convention creates a new and lasting foundation on which to build an inclusive and accessible Canada where rights can no longer be diminished on the basis of disability.

“Across the country, Canadians with disabilities and their families are celebrating,” said CACL President, Bendina Miller who participated in the ratification ceremony at the UN Headquarters in NY this morning with the Honourable Lawrence Cannon, Minister of Foreign Affairs. “This is a historic moment we should be proud of. Canada played a lead role in developing the Convention and is recognized as an international leader on disability and human rights. By ratifying the Convention, Canada commits to holding itself accountable to making real the rights of persons with disabilities. We are grateful for the efforts of the many people involved in getting us here today, including those in the government of Canada, from all the political parties, and our many partners and advocates in civil society. We are excited to continue to work alongside governments in Canada on implementing and monitoring the Convention.”

Michael Bach, CACL Executive Vice-President, reflected on the development of the Convention: “The Convention was influenced by a Canadian perspective and is a document that all Canadians should be proud of. Canadian concepts about inclusive education, living in the community and supported decision-making infuse the Convention. The Convention also recognizes the valuable role that families play in making rights a reality for their family members with disabilities. The Convention is also unique for the way it was developed. It is the first time in UN history that people affected by a treaty were actively engaged in the development of its text. It is a Convention that is informed by the lived experience of people with disabilities and their families.”

Moving forward, the Convention provides people with disabilities and their families a new tool to promote and advance the rights of people with disabilities and to building an inclusive and accessible Canada. Miller commented that: “The Convention is much more than a listing of entitlements. It is a road map that explains where, why and how the rights of people with disabilities have been neglected and what steps are required to realize human rights for people with disabilities in meaningful ways.”

Bach is optimistic that, “ratification provides Canada an opportunity to play a critical leadership role domestically and internationally on key issues in the Convention. The 2010 Federal Budget has already shown that Canada is providing leadership on key disability issues it advanced in the Convention. We hope to see Canada on the Committee of Experts associated with this Convention and demonstrating leadership on removing barriers and securing the full inclusion of people with disabilities.”

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### **About the Canadian Association for Community Living**

The Canadian Association for Community Living is a Canada-wide association of family members and others working to advance the human rights and inclusion of persons of all ages who have an intellectual disability.

Founded in 1958 by parents of children with intellectual disabilities who wanted supports and services within the community instead of in institutions, CACL has become one of Canada's ten largest charitable organizations, and has grown into a federation of 10 provincial and three territorial associations comprising of 420 local associations and over 40,000 members.

### **For more information, please contact:**

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## **Bendina Miller joins Minister Cannon at the Press Conference, United Nations Headquarters, announcing Canada's Ratification of UN Convention - March 11, 2010**

Good morning. My name is Bendina Miller and I am President of the Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL). As a national association of over 40,000 Canadians --- people with intellectual disabilities, family members and our community supporters and advocates we are honoured to mark this historic day for Canada. I am pleased to participate in this press conference and announcement with The Honourable Lawrence Cannon, Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs and to applaud his leadership and that of the Government of Canada in ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This Convention is about recognizing rights and respecting all people.

What does this convention mean for Canadians with intellectual disabilities? Let me share with you a story. Last year a mom and dad we know took their 5 year old daughter --- I'll call her Melissa --- to the neighbourhood school to register her for grade 1. They approached their meeting with trepidation because their daughter has some unique learning needs. Their fears proved justified when they walked into the school office for their appointment and the secretary took one look at their daughter and said, 'We don't do Downs here'. Article 24 of the UN Convention makes it an obligation on governments to establish inclusive education systems. As a Superintendent of Schools in a district in British Columbia I know it can be done. But it takes government leadership and public resources to make a quality inclusive education system for all. The UN Convention now makes that leadership a requirement under international law and recognizes an individual right to inclusive education. No one can refuse Melissa an education in her neighborhood school from this day forward. This is just one example of the power of the Convention to ensure equal citizenship, dignity and respect for all.

We congratulate the government of Canada today. We are proud of their leadership and sincerely appreciate the opportunities they provided for CACL and many others to contribute to the development of the Convention. The next phase of the work begins today --- realizing this international treaty in everyday life. CACL will be there every step of the way to help create a National Disability Agenda in Canada to implement this Convention and to monitor its realization in the years to come. We look forward to working with the Government of Canada in what we believe must be an effort of historic proportions.

- See recent press coverage of the Press Conference, Minister Cannon's and Bendina Miller's remarks at <http://www.montrealgazette.com/news/world/Promoting+rights+disabled+foreign+policy+focuss+Cannon/2671775/story.html#ixzz0hu4ohg92>
- To view the Government of Canada Press Release announcing ratification, go to <http://news.gc.ca/web/article-eng.do?m=/index&nid=517849>



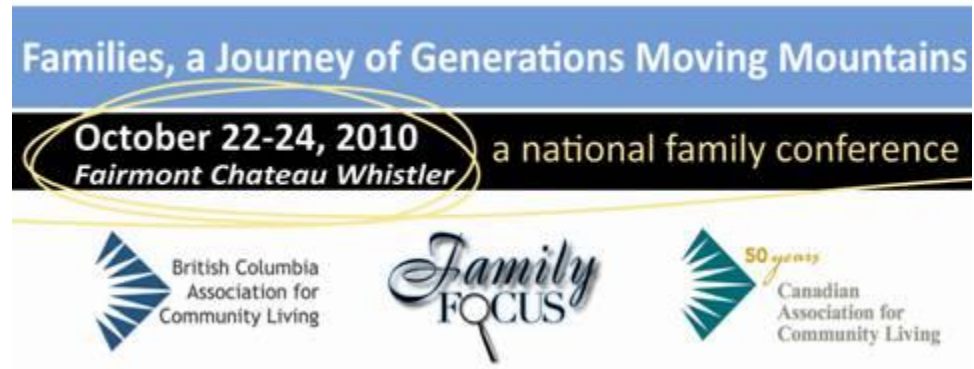
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