

## A LANDMARK VICTORY IN HUMAN RIGHTS BATTLE AS EU SIGNS UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITY

**Brussels, 5 January 2011 /// The European Union has officially ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on 23 December, becoming the first intergovernmental group to sign on to any human rights treaty. The European disability movement has been working hard to make sure the EU conclude the Convention by the end of 2010. The European Disability Forum welcomes this development, which is a significant landmark and will help improve the lives of 80 million persons with disabilities in Europe.**

### The disability movement welcomes the historical ratification

This represents a major policy shift toward enforcing human rights for all Europeans and putting disability on top of the human rights agenda.

Yannis Vardakastanis, President of the European Disability Forum, stressed: **“The European Union has not only achieved a major step in its history, but it is also sending a positive signal to its Member States that haven’t ratified the Convention yet: it is now time to commit to the rights of persons with disabilities.”**

In the European Union, more than 80 million persons have a disability, representing 15% of the residents from 27 countries. 11 of the 27 Member States still have to ratify the treaty.

The disability movement acknowledges the **key role of the Belgian Presidency that committed to concluding the UN Convention and succeeded in doing so.**

### The next steps to ensure the success of the implementation

First, the UN Convention asserts that every state party of the Convention has to establish a **focal point** for the coordination of implementation. At European level, a concrete action that the human rights activists call for as a next step is the **designation of the office of the European Commission’s Secretary General** to make sure disability is mainstreamed everywhere. The European disability movement calls on the incoming Hungarian Presidency to actively work towards the implementation in the first months of 2011. This necessary step will improve the lives of millions of European citizens with disabilities.

Secondly, the European disability movement is stressing the importance of the **involvement of the civil society organisations in the implementation of the treaty.**

### How does it bind the Members States and the EU?

All the institutions of the European Union will now have to endorse the values of the Convention in all policies under their competence ensuring mainstreaming of disability: from transport to employment and from information and communication technologies to development cooperation. It also means that they have to adjust the accessibility of their own buildings, their own employment and communications policy.

## Background information

### -About the UN Convention

#### **Nine core international human rights instruments**

There are nine core international human rights treaties at the UN level. Entered into force on May 2008, the UN Convention is the first United Nations Convention specifically related to the rights of people with disabilities; it became a reality largely due to active mobilization of those who participated in negotiating the text. For the EDF, this constitutes a historic achievement in the struggle against violations of the human rights of people with disabilities.

#### **-11 of the 27 EU members have yet to ratify the convention:**

Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, and Romania (although all have signed).

-Among European countries seeking EU membership, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey have ratified the convention, while Albania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, and Kosovo have not.

### -This is only the beginning

While welcoming the conclusion of the Convention by the European Union as the beginning of the new relationship between the EU and the UN, EDF voices its outstanding concerns:

-“We regret the reservation adopted by the Council to exclude the employment of persons with disabilities in the armed forces from the scope of the Convention. We invite other States Parties across the world to oppose this reservation to avoid setting a dangerous precedent worldwide,” stressed Donata Vivanti, EDF Vice-President.

-The delay in the procedure of the Community accession to the so-called Optional Protocol is harmful for citizens. According to this text European residents can claim their rights under the Convention if they had not been granted by the national courts. This delay also means that the UN Committee may not yet initiate the inquiry procedure into disabled persons’ rights violations in Europe. EDF wants to make sure the next EU presidency will work on the conclusion of the Optional Protocol.

### -About us

[The European Disability Forum](#) is the European umbrella organisation representing the interests of 80 million persons with disabilities in Europe. The mission of EDF is to ensure disabled people full access to fundamental and human rights through their active involvement in policy development and implementation in Europe. EDF is a member of the Social Platform and works closely to the European institutions, the Council of Europe and the United Nations.