



**CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES**

July 27, 2010

Honorable John F. Kerry, Committee Chair
Honorable Richard G. Lugar, Ranking Member
Foreign Relations Committee
United States Senate
446 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20520

Re: Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Dear Senators Kerry and Lugar:

On July 26, 2010, the United States celebrates twenty years since the passage of one of the most important civil rights laws in our history – the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This landmark legislation was the first major piece of domestic legislation in the world to address the discrimination, legal challenges, and physical and systemic barriers faced by individuals with disabilities. It is the true civil rights bill for individuals with disabilities in the United States. Since passage of the ADA, and the recent 2008 amendments to the Act passed by unanimous consent in the Senate, the physical, programmatic, and legal barriers faced by individuals with disabilities across the country have begun to erode. Congress took the critical step in protecting the rights of citizens with disabilities by enacting the ADA, but the work to ensure these protections in the United States and abroad must continue.

On July 30, 2009, the Obama Administration took another step to ensure the protection of the rights of individuals with disabilities by signing the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). We anticipate that the Obama Administration will soon submit the CRPD to the Senate to provide its advice and consent. The undersigned members of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities, a coalition of national consumer, advocacy, provider and professional organizations, takes this opportunity of the 20th Anniversary of the ADA to urge the Senate to quickly consider and ratify the CRPD upon submission by the Administration. As a world leader in establishing and enforcing the civil and legal rights of persons with disabilities, evidenced by the passage of the ADA, the United States must ratify this Convention.

The CRPD seeks the same goals the United States had in enacting the Americans with Disabilities Act twenty years ago: 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 vision for our citizens in enacting the ADA served as a beacon to people around the world and a strategy other nations have emulated.

During the six years of discussion and drafting of the CRPD, the State Department delegation and U.S. organizations of and for people with disabilities provided fundamental and valued technical assistance to the international community. By signing the CRPD last year, the Obama Administration reaffirmed the leadership position of the United States in establishing and protecting the human rights of individuals with disabilities. Ratification of the CRPD by the Senate will underscore and ensure our global leadership in disability rights.

When the Senate Foreign Relations Committee unanimously approved the resolution of ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 1992, the committee remarked "[i]n view of the leading role that the United States plays in the international struggle for human rights, the absence of U.S. ratification of the [ICCPR] is conspicuous The Committee believes that ratification will strengthen the impact of U.S. efforts in the human rights field." When the Administration transmits the CRPD to the Senate, we look forward to the Senate coming together again in bipartisan fashion, as it did in ratifying the ICCPR and in passing the ADA and the ADA Amendments Act, to swiftly consider and ratify the CRPD.

Eighty-eight nations have ratified the CRPD, including important allies of the United States. The Convention is furthermore consistent with not only the ADA, but also with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the Rehabilitation Act, and numerous other laws. The CRPD establishes international standards regarding the rights and freedoms of people with disabilities, and creates a common basis for greater civic and political participation and self-sufficiency. The Convention reflects core American values such as the dignity of the individual, access to justice, the importance of family decision-making, and access to appropriate health care.

These standards carry moral authority that lend weight and credibility to efforts in all parts of the world to achieve justice, equality and inclusion for individuals with disabilities. The United States' ratification of the treaty will continue our country's distinguished tradition as a world leader for people with disabilities as evidenced by the ADA. Ratification will allow U.S. participation on the CRPD Conference of States Parties, and provide input into the implementation of the treaty and the development of disability rights. Such participation will not only further our nation's vision for global human rights, but assist 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 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, 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, and therefore urge the Senate to quickly consider and ratify, once presented with, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Sincerely,

Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
American Association on Health and Disability
American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
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
American Physical Therapy Association
APSE
Association of Assistive Technology Act Programs
Association of University Centers on Disabilities
Autism National Committee (AutCom)
Autism Society
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Brain Injury Association of America
Burton Blatt Institute
Council for Exceptional Children
Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates, Inc.
Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation
Council for Learning Disabilities
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund
Easter Seals
Epilepsy Foundation
Family Voices
Helen Keller National Center
JBS International, Inc.
Learning Disabilities Association of America
National Alliance for Caregiving
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities
National Association of State Head Injury Administrators
National Coalition on Deaf-Blindness
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
National Council on Independent Living
National Disability Institute
National Disability Rights Network
National Down Syndrome Congress
National Industries for the Blind
National Multiple Sclerosis Society

National Organization on Disability
National Rehabilitation Association
National Respite Coalition
Paralyzed Veterans of America
RESNA, the Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology of North America
School Social Work Association of America
TASH
The Advocacy Institute
The ARC of the United States
United Cerebral Palsy
United States International Council on Disabilities
VetsFirst
World Institute on Disability

cc: Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton
General James L. Jones, National Security Advisor
Kareem Dale, Special Assistant to the President of the United States