



**PERMANENT MISSION OF JAMAICA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

STATEMENT BY

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UNDERAGENDA ITEM 5a: *GENERAL DEBATE*

**AT THE
7th CONFERENCE OF STATES PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION
ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

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Mr. Chairman,

The Jamaican delegation welcomes this opportunity to participate in the General Debate on Agenda item 5 regarding '*Matters related to the implementation of the Convention*'.

Jamaica attaches high priority to the wellbeing of persons with disabilities. Given our concern for this important sector of our society, we were motivated to join the international community in December 2006 in adopting the landmark Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, widely regarded as the first comprehensive human rights treaty of the 21st Century. It may be recalled that Jamaica was the first country to sign and ratify the Convention on 30th March 2007. We also signed the Optional Protocol on that day. There is no doubt, Mr. Chairman, that the Convention has served as the major catalyst in transforming global perspectives of persons with disabilities, whereby these persons are no longer viewed as objects of charity and social protection, but as full and equal members of society, with human rights.

Mr. Chairman,

The development of Jamaica's Vision 2030 National Development Plan which envisages Jamaica to be '*the place of choice to live, work, raise families and do business*', was not undertaken without consideration of persons with disabilities. The Government of Jamaica has sought to incorporate the spirit of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities into the Vision 2030 National Development Plan by underscoring the importance of including persons with disabilities in the development agenda, with a view to providing a better standard of living for them.

As part of efforts to address barriers that hinder persons with disabilities from achieving their full potential, while promoting personal responsibility among them, the Jamaica Council for Persons with Disabilities (JCPD), the agency mandated to implement Government policies and programmes for persons with disabilities, has been providing rehabilitation services, vocational training for persons with disabilities, and raising public awareness on issues affecting them.

In an effort to ensure that persons with disabilities can contribute effectively to Jamaica's development, the country's Labour Policy makes allowance for 5% of jobs in the public sector to be reserved for the disabled, provided they possess the required qualifications. Empowerment Grants are disbursed to disabled persons to allow them to undertake entrepreneurial activities in specified occupations. We also have a National Disability Awards Programme which recognises efforts to remove barriers and facilitates access for persons with disabilities.

Persons with disabilities also benefit from the Programme of Advancement through Health and Education (PATH) which offers social protection to the most vulnerable groups in Jamaica, including persons with disabilities, and provides economic opportunities through skills-training, job preparation and access to employment through entrepreneurial activities, so as to improve beneficiaries' quality of life. In this regard, the Government of Jamaica appreciates the kind support of the World Bank in strengthening the social protection system under the PATH programme.

Education

Mr. Chairman,

In the field of education, Jamaica has sought to ensure that children with disabilities have access to school-based special education programmes. In fact, our records indicate that over 4,000 students with special needs are enrolled in schools. Home- and community-based rehabilitation programmes have also improved opportunities for children with mental and intellectual disabilities to access vocational training. There is currently one post-secondary vocational training facility which serves youth and adults with special needs.

The Government has established an Early Stimulation Programme (ESP) which focuses on improving the development of children from birth to six (6) years by providing early intervention and assessment services for children with disabilities. To ensure the continuity of these educational programmes, we have also instituted a programme for the training of teachers in special education up to the graduate level. The University of the West Indies has a Centre for Disability Studies which will be granting bursaries to students.

Despite the provisions in place in relation to education, the demand for special education services far outweighs the ability of the current system to provide for the myriad administrative, instructional, corrective, therapeutic, and professional needs of the sub-population of students with special needs and practitioners in the field. Capacity development is required in this area.

Transportation/access

Cognisant of the need to enhance the mobility of persons with disabilities, the state-owned transportation company, Jamaica Urban Transit Company (JUTC), has expanded its fleet to include additional buses that are retrofitted to accommodate wheelchair users. The building codes are also being revised to ensure that public facilities are user-friendly – that is, to accommodate wheelchair ramps and other amenities for persons with disabilities. As a priority, the national disaster preparedness evacuation exercises have been reformatted to take into account persons with disabilities and the procedures governing their movements in the event of a disaster.

In this connection, I am pleased to note that Jamaica's Road Traffic Act has been amended to allow persons with physical disabilities to obtain drivers' licences. Previous restrictions imposed on the hearing-impaired to obtain a drivers' licence have been removed to allow access to this facility that will enhance the mobility of persons living with disabilities.

Looking ahead

Mr. Chairman,

While we have made significant strides, we cannot afford to become complacent. One area to which we intend to devote immediate attention is in the area of legislation. While persons with disabilities are guaranteed certain protections under the Constitution of Jamaica and the Charter of Rights (2011), Jamaica is seeking to ensure that domestic laws and the institutional framework are robust, and guarantee the rights and freedoms of these individuals.

To this end, it is anticipated that the Disability Bill, which was tabled in Parliament on May 7, 2014, will be debated and approved in short order, following the conclusion of public consultations which have just commenced. In keeping with Vision 2030, it is envisaged that the Disability Act, when approved, will guarantee the protection of the specific rights of persons with disabilities and their inclusion in all areas of national development.

In keeping with its reporting obligations in relation to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Jamaica is currently in the process of finalising its first report for submission to the Committee in the coming months.

The Government continues efforts toward improving the capacity of Jamaica's Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MLSS) to advance social protection policies that would enhance the welfare of persons with disabilities. As such, it has embarked on a Technical Cooperation Project with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), which is aimed, *inter alia*, at creating an electronic database of persons with disabilities, conducting a socio-economic survey of these persons, and the development of a five-year communication plan to build public awareness of the needs and rights of persons with disabilities.

In closing, I should also underscore that Jamaica's commitment to the needs of persons with disabilities is shared across the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). In December 2013, CARICOM Heads of Government, in the context of a CARICOM High Level Ministerial Meeting on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Special Needs in Pétion-Ville, Haiti, signed the Declaration of Pétion-Ville which sets out a framework for inclusion and accessibility, and underlined their commitment to protecting the rights of persons with disabilities.

Mr. Chairman,

The journey to this stage has been challenging, yet quite fulfilling. However, Jamaica remains committed to the advancement of the welfare of this important sector of the Jamaican society. We acknowledge support received from the Governments of Japan and Spain in advancing our efforts to date. However, our continued success will require the sustained support of the international community as it is only through collective effort that sustainable socio-economic and political development for persons with disabilities can be achieved. As a community of nations, we should also ensure that as we craft the post-2015 development agenda, including the Sustainable Development Goals, we are inclusive of persons with disabilities.

My delegation looks forward to an engaging discussion during the course of this seventh Conference.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.