



AUSTRALIA



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UNITED NATIONS

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International Day of Persons with Disabilities

**Statement by H.E. Mitch Fifield
Ambassador and Permanent Representative
of Australia to the United Nations**

As delivered

Thank you so much Chair and good morning friends.

It is great to be with you on this International Day of Persons with Disabilities. The rights of people with disability is something I feel particularly passionate about as a former Australian Minister for Disabilities.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Australians with a disability for educating me; for their role in forming my perspectives on what really matters in public policy.

I'd like to do that through acknowledging the role of a woman named Milly Parker. She's a woman with an acquired brain injury. She's an amazing business women and an incredible advocate. Through you, Milly, thanks to the crew in Australia.

Friends, the truth that we all know is that for far too long, people with disability have quite simply gotten a raw deal. Decisions have been

taken about them without them. And where there has been support it has often been a patchwork that has been determined not by their needs, but by how they acquired their disability.

So it's right that we observe this day. That we take this as an opportunity to pause and to reflect on what has been achieved, but also what we still need to collectively do.

What has happened in Australia when it comes to people with disabilities is something that I think is quite remarkable. We had a point half a dozen years ago where Australians with disabilities, their families, their carers and their friends, came together and spoke with one voice, and said, "We're mad as hell, and we're not going to take it anymore."

They demanded change, and they got change.

As a result of that coming together and of speaking with one voice, we now have a *National Disability Strategy*, where local, state and national governments know what their roles and responsibilities are. We now have a twenty-two billion dollar-per-year *National Disability Insurance Scheme*, where the needs of an individual are assessed, they're given an entitlement, effectively a voucher, which they can take to the service provider of their choice to support their inclusion in the way that they choose.

There is progress being made.

We need to act locally, but we also need to act globally, which is why I warmly welcome the Secretary-General's commitment to disability inclusion, and why we're very pleased to support the initial implementation of the *UN Disability Inclusion Strategy*, launched earlier this year.

It's great that the theme for this year's day is on *participation and leadership of people with disabilities*. The concept is central to the idea of "Nothing about us without us". It's just so important that people with disability get the support and the skills to take up leadership positions to determine their own futures.

We see this untapped knowledge of people with disability also being taken advantage of when it comes to our development partnerships and our international advocacy work. It becomes much more effective.

Disability inclusion is also firmly embedded in our humanitarian assistance programs. In times of crisis, people with disabilities, particularly women and children, are often the first to be left behind, and face barriers accessing life-saving relief and recovery support. So we do welcome the growing momentum around ensuring the rights and needs of people with disabilities are safeguarded and addressed in humanitarian crises. Persons with disabilities must be involved in all stages of preparedness, response, and recovery.

It was great that we recently had the launch of the IASC *Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action*. Australia is a proud sponsor of that initiative. But unless this is implemented through meaningful partnerships between governments, agencies and people with disabilities, these kinds of global initiatives won't make a tangible difference.

Despite the strong and increasing commitment by the international community represented here today, we still have further to go. People with disabilities still face significant barriers to their full inclusion.

Even when we have all the right consultations, even when we have the right budget allocations, even when we have the right supports

provided, we still won't get there unless we can collectively lift our sights to tackle the soft bigotry of low expectations when it comes to people with disability.

We do all those things, and we will have achieved success, but we've got a way to go yet.

Thanks very much.