



Disabled Peoples' International

Organisation Mondiale des Personnes Handicapées

Organización Mundial de Personas con Discapacidad

A Voice Of Our Own • Notre Propre Voix • Nuestra Propia Voz

January 30, 2009

Dear Colleagues,¹

Patron:
Her Excellency the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean
C.C., C.M.M., C.O.M., C.D.
Governor General of Canada

Chairperson:
Wilfredo Guzman Jara, Peru

Past-Chair:
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Deputy Chairperson for Development and Under-Represented Groups:
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Latin America: Lima, Peru

North America & The Caribbean: St. John's, Antigua

We write you today to advise you of an important new development in your region, and to encourage you to become involved!² The event that we speak of is the formation of a new Human Rights Organization, called the ASEAN Human Rights Body (AHRB), under the umbrella of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. This work had been going on for some time and our RDO, Saowalak Thongkuay, has taken the time to share this exciting and important news with us at HQ.

In light of her excellent work to date we wanted to take a moment and ask that you also get involved. We know that you, like all DPI members, already have a lot of work to do, so the first thing we wanted to do was to share some thoughts on why this is important and why you should get involved. Following this, based on experience in other places, we wanted to share a few ideas on how you might get involved.

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¹ This letter is intended for Disabled Peoples Organizations in states that are members of the ASEAN, which includes the following member countries: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

² We note that currently Brunei Darussalam, Myanmar and Vietnam do not have DPI Member National Assemblies.

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Why get involved?

In this era with the new Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) we must do all we can to ensure that governments understand the clear links between Human Rights and Disability. In the ASEAN group only two states (the Philippines and Thailand) have ratified the CRPD. Very clearly a strong disability presence in the new Human Rights body would be very helpful in your efforts to get other ASEAN members to ratify the treaty.

Moreover, the CRPD signals a change in how governments are looking at disability issues around the world. Everywhere there is talk of a new approach to disability issues.

That approach reflects and respects the fact that people with disabilities are no longer passive recipients of social services, but instead we are active holders of human rights; and any new or emerging Human Rights bodies must acknowledge what has been accepted by the UN and its High Commissioner for Human Rights. To do anything less is a step backwards and is not acceptable.

How can you get involved?

While we note that only two ASEAN states have ratified the CRPD we also wish to point out that most other states (Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore and Vietnam) have signed the CRPD.

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In signing, a country indicates its intention to take all necessary steps to ratify a treaty. As such the majority of ASEAN members have indicated their openness to the new understanding of Disability as a Human Rights Issue. These members therefore should be very willing to support the inclusion of disability in the mandate of the new ASEAN Human Rights body, and letters to ministries of foreign affairs and other officials drawing attention to this fact will be very helpful in efforts to advance the idea at the national level.

We therefore invite you to draft letters as quickly as possible to your governments urging them to be consistent with their other international obligations regarding persons with disabilities.

Finally, we encourage you once again to make the most of this historic opportunity. The creation of an important new Human Rights Body offers DPI National Assemblies a wonderful opportunity to work in support of both the advancement of the CRPD and of the understanding of disability as a human rights issue that it promotes.

Sincerely,



Mary Ennis
Executive Director
DPI - Headquarters

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