

## Secretary-General's Message for World Autism Awareness Day 2015

I am hugely encouraged by the growing public awareness of autism spectrum disorders and the increase of public services to many of those affected. World Autism Awareness Day not only fosters greater understanding, it empowers parents into seeking early intervention therapies and calls for the full integration of persons with autism into society. It also invites policy-makers to encourage schools to open their doors to students with autism. With adequate support, they can -- and should -- be educated in the heart of their communities. Now is the time for even greater access and work opportunities for persons with autism.

This year, I am pleased to launch an employment “Call to Action”, inviting businesses to make concrete commitments to employ people on the autism spectrum. We encourage public offices, corporations, and small businesses to have a closer look at the way they perceive people with autism, to take the time to learn about the condition and to create life-changing opportunities.

People with autism have enormous potential. Most have remarkable visual, artistic or academic skills. Thanks to the use of assistive technologies, non-verbal persons with autism can communicate and share their hidden capabilities. Recognizing the talents of persons on the autism spectrum, rather than focusing on their weaknesses, is essential to creating a society that is truly inclusive.

Yet even where autism awareness is most advanced, more than 80 per cent of adults with autism are unemployed. That is why it is so important for employers to understand their unique and often exceptional skills, and to enable work environments where they can excel.

This important mission can only be achieved with appropriate vocational training and adequate support alongside a recruitment process that can allow people to successfully integrate into workforces around the world.

The United Nations General Assembly has called for greater access and opportunities for persons with autism. In declaring 2 April as World Autism Awareness Day, the Assembly also called for training for public administrators, service providers, care-givers, families and non-professionals to support the integration of persons with autism into society, so that they can realize their full potential.

On World Autism Awareness Day, let us join forces to create the best possible conditions for those with autism, so that they can make their own contribution to a future that is fair and sustainable for all.

*Ban Ki-moon*