

High-Level Statement

by

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Government of Canada

for the

Seventeenth Session of the Conference of States Parties to the
United Nations *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*

United Nations Headquarters,

New York City

June 11, 2024

Mr. President, Excellencies, Representatives and Delegates: as Canada's Minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Persons with Disabilities, it is an honour to be here representing the Government of Canada at the 17th Session of the Conference of State Parties to the UN *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.

First, Canada would like to congratulate the nine new members elected to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Their experience and knowledge will be crucial to the Committee's important work.

Canada also wants to pay tribute to Steven Estey, an unfaltering advocate and compassionate leader in the human rights community, who passed away last September. Our efforts, domestically and globally, to promote and protect human rights have been strengthened by the work of courageous human rights defenders like Steven. His efforts to educate Canadians on the rights of persons with disabilities and empower individuals to build communities that are more inclusive will continue to inspire generations to come.

The Convention is foundational to Canada's human-rights-based approach to disability inclusion, as we continue to advance our Disability Inclusion Action Plan, our roadmap to create a truly barrier-free Canada where everyone can meaningfully participate and is included in all aspects of society.

Our Disability Inclusion Action Plan takes a whole-of-government approach to disability inclusion and is organized under four pillars: financial security; employment; accessible and inclusive communities; and a modern approach to disability.

Canada has made solid progress this past year under the financial security pillar, as the Government of Canada is launching a new Canada Disability Benefit, a major milestone in our steadfast commitment to reducing the economic barriers to inclusion that many Canadians with disabilities face. This benefit will support the financial wellbeing of hundreds of thousands of working-age Canadians with disabilities, having long-lasting impacts for generations to come.

Canada also recognizes that meaningful employment is essential for social inclusion, financial autonomy, and personal fulfillment. In Canada, persons with disabilities are still underrepresented in the labour market. Our most recent survey on disability found that 62% of working-age adults with disabilities are employed, compared to 78% of persons without disabilities.

To advance Canada's commitment to building accessible businesses, the Disability Inclusion Business Council was created in 2022. Comprising business leaders from a wide array of sectors, the Council is leading the way in creating a more inclusive economy by promoting cultural change on disability inclusion in the workplace. Moreover, to truly effect transformational change within Canadian businesses and have a larger impact on our Canadian economy, the Council was also mandated to launch an independent business network and provide a recommendation report with advice on improving workplace inclusivity. The first part of its mandate was achieved last year, with the launch of the Canadian Business Disability Network. The mission of this self-governed independent network is to empower its member organizations to embrace disability-inclusive best practices that enhance their businesses and contribute positively to their employees and customers. Together, we are forging a path towards a more inclusive and prosperous future for all Canadians.

Canada has also developed new programs under the Disability Inclusion Action Plan, such as the Equitable Access to Reading Program. This program aims to provide access to reading materials in alternate formats to advance the social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities, including those with intersecting identities. Additionally, over the past year, we have supported hundreds of local initiatives that are making workplaces more accessible and helping Canadians with disabilities advance their careers.

This year, Canada is also celebrating the 5th anniversary of the *Accessible Canada Act*. We have recently welcomed the first report from Canada's Chief Accessibility Officer, a historic step forward for the implementation of the Act and to achieving a barrier-free country.

But still, we know that there's a lot more work to do. Under our Disability Inclusion Action Plan, we are set to launch an Employment Strategy for Canadians with disabilities to ensure equal access to opportunities without discrimination, which is critical to our economic growth. The Strategy will support persons with disabilities in preparing for, obtaining, and maintaining a job, becoming self-employed, or advancing their careers.

The Strategy's goals are people-centred and focus on **individuals**, by helping them find and maintain good jobs, advance in their careers, or become entrepreneurs. It also aims to support **employers** in diversifying their workforces by creating inclusive and accessible workplaces. Additionally, the Strategy aims to help **enablers** to increase the supply, capacity, and reach of individuals and organizations that work to support disability inclusion and accessibility in employment.

But we know that a more accessible and inclusive Canada becomes even more impactful when the world is accessible and inclusive.

Canada values its engagement in the Global Action on Disability Network and understands the importance of leading by example on disability inclusion to advance the implementation of the UN Convention and to deliver on the 2030 Agenda. That's why at the 2022 Global Disability Summit, Canada announced a series of commitments focused on strengthening disability-inclusive programming, advocacy, and capacity development. Canada looks forward to continued engagement with the governments of Germany and Jordan and the International Disability Alliance in the lead up to the next Summit, so that we can strengthen our disability-inclusion commitments.

Canada also strongly supports the full and equal participation and leadership of persons with disabilities in all their diversity, at all levels: local, national and international. In the lead-up to the Summit of the Future we will continue to support language in the *Pact for the Future* that reflects the diverse needs, aspirations, and lived experiences of persons with disabilities. Canada will also continue to partner with disability rights defenders to advance disability inclusion in all international forums.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities. This mandate has been an unwavering defender of human rights for persons with disabilities, guiding States to recognize persistent barriers, establish policies to promote and protect human rights and strive for equal access to opportunities. Canada is committed in its support of this mandate; we encourage all States Parties to consider how persons with disabilities remain subjected to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, online and in-person. We urge all States to ensure their equal right to a safe, accessible, and prosperous future.

Canada looks forward to participating in discussions over the next few days and exchanging best practices with international partners on the implementation of the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.

Diversity is our greatest strength, and we can only achieve transformational change by combining our global efforts to build a world where the contributions of every single person are valued and celebrated.