

New Zealand Permanent Mission to the United Nations

Te Aka Aorere

17th Conference of States Parties to the CRPD

New Zealand Statement delivered by
Permanent Representative, H.E. Ms. Carolyn Schwalger

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Mr President,

I would like to begin by acknowledging the recent passing of a beacon of light in the disability rights movement. As a serving member of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Sir Robert Martin was the first person with a learning disability to be elected to any United Nations body. Sir Robert brought the lived experience of people with disabilities to his domestic and international advocacy – reflecting the “nothing about us without us” mantra of disability advocates worldwide.

We join Sir Robert’s family and the disability community not only in New Zealand but across the globe in mourning his loss. May his legacy live on and may we continue to strive for more a more inclusive future.

New Zealand’s own Disability Strategy aims to realise an inclusive future and we will work hard to achieve this. New Zealand will also continue to champion disability rights globally, and support efforts to remove barriers to inclusion. We are proud to co-chair the UN Group of Friends of Persons with Disabilities alongside Mexico, and co-lead resolutions both in the Third Committee on the rights of persons with disabilities in situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies, and in the recent Human Rights Council session on support systems to ensure community inclusion for persons with disabilities.

New Zealand welcomes the progress made towards the implementation of the UN Disability Strategy. New Zealand calls for accessibility in all parts of the UN system, and the inclusion of persons with disabilities’ leadership and involvement in the successful implementation of the strategy.

New Zealand particularly welcomes the focus of the COSP on rethinking disability inclusion in light of the Summit of the Future. We believe that

practices and values which have been core to the development of the CRPD – equality of opportunity for all, involvement in decision making by those most impacted (including recognition of the role of civil society), and the development of a global infrastructure emphasising human rights - remain instructive, and perhaps even more important, in the current wider geo-political context. Sir Robert Martin believed squarely in these practices and values and we encourage meaningful action by States to reflect them in the processes and outcomes ahead of us this year.

Sir Robert would also challenge us to focus on the potential of the international system and remind us that he was a survivor, especially in his early years, of a system which took a pessimistic view of what he could achieve. While he was always honest around the challenges facing disabled people, he sought a future which remembered the past but did not replicate it. New Zealand invites this COSP, in memory of Sir Robert, to commit to true equality for everyone, and systems and processes which make that a reality.

Thank you.