



Statements and Speeches

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1981: INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF DISABLED PERSONS

A Statement by the Honourable Walter Dinsdale, M.P., to the Third Committee of the Thirty-fourth Regular Session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, November 27, 1979

The Canadian Government strongly supported the motions which proclaimed 1981 the International Year of Disabled Persons and established the Secretariat and Advisory Committee to prepare for 1981. Today, we reiterate that support and congratulate the Advisory Committee on the Report that is before us. It is an excellent blueprint for the Year of the Disabled, and I am pleased to see that a number of countries have begun preparatory work for 1981.

Celebrations during the International Year will have to be focused on individual member states, for it is axiomatic that the disabled can best be served within the context of the needs and experience of each country.

But Canada also supports the suggestion that regional or sub-regional intergovernmental organizations prepare regional plans for the year. We feel that it is important that these regional commissions, or regional intergovernmental organizations, report back to the Advisory Committee for purposes of co-ordination and consultation. Prevention and rehabilitation are vital concerns of all countries, and only by co-operation and co-ordination on a technical level can these needs be met.

The needs in rural and underserved areas present a special problem. The technical meetings of officials responsible for national programs of disability prevention and rehabilitation will result in the development of new and innovative methods of dealing effectively with these needs. The regional initiatives already taken within the European Social Development Program and the Organization of African Unity demonstrate this point.

I would suggest that the specialized agencies and bodies of the UN could co-ordinate these regional efforts through continuing inter-agency consultations. Non-governmental organizations, such as Rehabilitation International, should also be involved.

In Canada, preparations for the Year are well under way. A Bureau of Rehabilitation has been established in the Department of National Health and Welfare. The Canadian Government is proposing the appointment of a Select Committee of the House of Commons. This Select Committee will examine the nature and scope of current federal policies, programs and services directed to the general public and those designed to assist disabled persons. It will review the relationship between existing federal programs and those programs and services carried out by the voluntary sector and the provinces, and will report and make recommendations on the measures

required to best meet the special needs of the disabled.

The most basic of needs is the guarantee and protection of civil rights. The Canadian Human Rights Act offers some protection to disabled persons with respect to employment. The Government is now committed to extending this right to all facilities and services.

Concerning better employment opportunities for the disabled, the Canadian Employment and Immigration Commission is developing a strategy for employment of the disabled in the private sector. An Advisory Committee composed of disabled persons advises the Treasury Board on policies related to the hiring of the handicapped. In addition, the Adult Occupational Training Act is being amended, and work incentives and their relation to employment of disadvantaged groups are presently under federal-provincial review.

Adequate income is another priority. Many disabled persons must rely on transfer payments to make ends meet, and there is room for improvement. A Parliamentary Committee on Pensions is considering disability provisions of private and public plans in terms of adequacy.

Attitudes towards the disabled are often their greatest handicap. Canada has tackled this problem in a unique way with a national multi-media advertising campaign aimed at increasing public awareness and sensitivity to the problems and needs of the disabled. This has aroused interest internationally, and has been discussed at a recent UNESCO Round Table. The campaign is an excellent example of co-operation between the Federal Government and the Canadian Rehabilitation Council for the Disabled (CRCD), a non-governmental organization.

Integration of the disabled implies providing access to the community. While many physical barriers still exist, the Canadian Government has adopted a policy on physical accessibility with regard to federal public buildings. 1983 is the target date for completion of the program to make federal public buildings accessible to the disabled.

Access to the community also means having available adequate transportation. A federal Advisory Committee on Transportation for the Handicapped has recently been established to advise the Minister of Transport on the needs of the handicapped, and the policies required to meet them. You will be interested to know that I have just come from a Conference in Ottawa, organized by Canada's consumer group, The Coalition of Provincial Organizations of the Handicapped (COPHO). The theme of the Conference is Transportation for the Disabled. There has been so much public interest in the hearings that they have been extended a day.

Technology for the handicapped has a high profile in Canada's National Research Council. The NRC has established a rehabilitation technology unit to provide support for product development by establishing the clinical and economic feasibility of a product as well as encouraging industrial participation. The NRC is also involved in

the establishment of Technical Aids and Systems for the Handicapped (TASH), a marketing agency in the voluntary sector under the auspices of the Canadian Rehabilitation Council for the Disabled. Its objective is to market, service, and encourage the Canadian manufacture of aids to the handicapped which are unavailable through other means.

If the status of disabled persons in Canada has improved during the past decade, it is largely due to the disabled themselves, who have taken on an increasingly important and decisive role on their own behalf. The voluntary sector has also expanded its role as a provider of services and continues to lobby governments at all levels to improve the quality and range of services.

In this connection, we wish to bring to your attention the fourteenth World Congress of Rehabilitation International to be held in Winnipeg, in my home province, Manitoba, next June 1980. Its theme is "Prevention and Integration — Priorities for the Eighties". Congress organizers hope that the results of the meeting, particularly the Charter for the Eighties that will be coming from the Congress, will prove useful to the United Nations in its development of long-term plans for the next decade. Some 6,000 leaders in the rehabilitation movement from around the world will be in attendance, including many who are at this meeting today. It is my Government's hope that it will be possible for all member states to be represented at the Conference.

In conclusion, then, let me report that the Government of Canada is in full agreement with the Draft Resolution proposal on this item. We are prepared, within the limits of our financial and human resources, to do everything possible to improve the lifestyle of the disabled in Canada and around the world. The proposed leadership role of the United Nations may be crucial for the eventual realization of this objective. It is important that the United Nations itself, as an organization, ensures that its own services and facilities recognize the importance of prevention and integration. The roles of member states are equally vital. To this end, an Organizing Committee for 1981 will be established early in 1980 to give overall direction to the Canadian program for the International Year. This Committee will bring together representatives from different sectors of the community, including organizations of disabled persons, service agencies, organized labour and the business community. Its main thrust will be to stimulate the participation of the voluntary and private sectors, as well as different levels of government. In this manner, it is hoped that Canadians in all walks of life will become involved in projects and activities related to the International Year of Disabled Persons.

We advocate the development of mechanisms for information-sharing between countries in order to accelerate the attainment of our desired goal — quality of life for all. I believe that with all the member states working together, the International Year of Disabled Persons, while it might not add years to their lives, will certainly add life to their years. After all, a more abundant life is what we are all seeking.