



# Letter from the President

International Bureau for Epilepsy

December 2006

Dear Friends

As I write this letter today, 13<sup>th</sup> December, I am aware that it is a truly historic moment - it is the day on which the General Assembly of the United Nations has adopted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which I have mentioned briefly in a recent issue of the IE News. I wanted to share this news with you all - as this important step will further encourage and facilitate our work in improving the social conditions for people with epilepsy worldwide.

Please see the following statement from the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan on the adoption, as delivered by Mark Malloch Brown, Deputy Secretary-General, in New York, today, 13 December:

"For most people in this room, today marks an important event: the day the General Assembly adopts the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. But for 650 million persons around the world living with disabilities, today promises to be the dawn of a new era -- an era in which disabled people will no longer have to endure the discriminatory practices and attitudes that have been permitted to prevail for all too long.

This Convention is a remarkable and forward-looking document. While it focuses on the rights and development of people with disabilities, it also speaks about our societies as a whole -- and about the need to enable every person to contribute to the best of their abilities and potential.

Throughout the ages, the treatment of people with disabilities has brought out some of the worst aspects of human nature. Too often, those living with disabilities have been seen as objects of embarrassment, and at best, of condescending pity and charity. Societies have even gone out of their way to ensure that persons with disabilities are neither seen nor heard. On paper, they have enjoyed the same rights as others; in real life, they have often been relegated to the margins and denied the opportunities that others take for granted.

It was the community of the disabled themselves

that worked tirelessly and insistently to promote this Convention, and the United Nations responded.

In three short years, the Convention became a landmark several times over: it is the first human rights treaty to be adopted in the twenty-first century; the most rapidly negotiated human rights treaty in the history of international law; and the first to emerge from lobbying conducted extensively through the Internet.

We have already learnt from experience, in countries that have implemented legislation related to disability, that change comes more rapidly when laws are in place. Once the Convention is adopted, signed and ratified, it will have an impact on national laws that will transform how people with disabilities can live their lives. It will offer a way forward to ensure that those with disabilities enjoy the same human rights as everyone else -- in education, employment, access to buildings and other facilities, and access to justice.

It will not happen overnight. Much work remains to be done to produce the results that are aspired from the Convention. I urge all Governments to start by ratifying, and then implementing it, without delay.

This adoption happens to fall, in the Western Christian calendar, on the day of Saint Lucy, celebrated in some countries as the patron saint both of blindness and of light. Let us ensure that this day indeed marks a new dawn. Let it usher in an age when all those living with disabilities around the world become fully fledged citizens of their societies".

I hope that many countries will ratify the document so that we will be able to use the Convention as a powerful tool against stigma and prejudice, and as a benchmark for the provision of equal opportunities for people with epilepsy around the globe. These aims are at the core of all of our activities undertaken in our effort to eliminate the barriers that prevent people with epilepsy living their lives as equals in society.

I Wish you the Compliments of the Season and a Prosperous New Year!

Susanne Lund  
President

