



## Opening Remarks

by President Diane Richler

to Plenary Session of

Inclusion International 15<sup>th</sup> World Congress

*Berlin, Germany, June 16, 2010*

Welcome to Berlin and to what promises to be a very exciting 15<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Inclusion International.

Before I make any comments, it is my honour to read the message we received from His Excellency Ban Ki-Moon, Secretary General of the United Nations.

### **MESSAGE TO XV CONGRESS OF INCLUSION INTERNATIONAL,**

#### **Berlin, 15-19 June 2010**

It is a great pleasure to greet all the participants in the XV Congress of Inclusion International.

For half a century, your organization has carried out tireless and important advocacy for the rights and well-being of individuals with intellectual disabilities and their families. This congress, hosted by Inclusion Europe and Bundesvereinigung Lebenshilfe, with participants from more than 50 countries, is yet another manifestation of an unwavering commitment to the goals of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

As of today, 145 countries have signed and 87 have ratified the Convention. As more States become parties to the Convention, and as the Convention becomes a universal standard, the wide-ranging engagement of civil society, governments and others will continue to be vital. We all need to join forces to make a difference in the lives of persons and children with intellectual disabilities. Experience shows that when persons with disabilities are empowered, their active involvement creates enabling environments for all – with or without a disability.

As you mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Inclusion International, let us reaffirm our commitment to transform global rights into action, as your chosen theme aptly puts it. An inclusive society is essential for social progress and development. I look forward to our continued partnership in building a just and equitable society for all. Thank you for your contributions and support of this important United Nations goal, and please accept my best wishes for a successful Congress.

This is the first time Inclusion International has received such a message from the Secretary General of the United Nations. It is a great honour as well as a tribute to the work we have done. But it is also a challenge.

We are gathered at an historic time in an historic place. Berlin is an historic place because for a long time it was a symbol of a people and a world divided by a wall. That wall finally crumbled and Berlin is now a symbol of unity and solidarity – a city of culture, history and reconciliation.

This is an historic time because the whole world is focussed on the World Cup football matches in South Africa, a country that for many years was also a symbol of division and lack of respect for human rights.

Nelson Mandela, a man who suffered indignities and violence because of the colour of his skin has taught that people who have been oppressed understand the value of full inclusion and can lead others by example.

We fought hard to have a convention on the rights of persons with disabilities that would respect the full human rights of persons who have an intellectual disability and their families. We were successful in achieving:

- Respect for the role of families; and
- The rights for persons with an intellectual disability
  - to make their own decisions
  - to go to regular schools and
  - to live in the community

Now we need to transform those rights into action.

While we watch the World Cup football games and cheer for our favourite teams, we should learn a lesson from Nelson Mandela. Gaining rights for one group cannot be done at the expense of others. When we fight for inclusive education, we need to be helping to make better schools for all. When we combat the poverty of people who have intellectual disability and their families we need to help resolve broader issues of sustainable development and tackle issues of access to food, water, sanitation, health care and housing for all.

That means we need to work with new partners, and not just talk about what we don't have, we need to contribute to finding solutions that will make the world a better place for all.

Allow me to tell you a story that some of you have heard before.

My father grew up in the Great Depression. His family did not have a lot of money, but they knew that every Sunday evening the family would sit down together for a delicious meal. One Sunday, while the chicken was roasting in the oven, the doorbell rang and some unexpected cousins arrived for a visit. Of course my grandmother invited them in, hoping that they would leave in time for her to serve dinner to her family. She could smell the chicken as the skin got nice and brown, and seemed ready. She waited, hoping the chicken would not get overdone, but the cousins could smell it too, and they stayed in their seats. Finally, my grandmother invited them to stay for dinner and they gladly accepted. Unfortunately, there was only one chicken, so as my father and his brothers walked to the table, my grandmother whispered to them that when the platter of chicken was passed around they should say they weren't hungry so that there would be enough for the cousins to eat.

My father and his brothers dutifully passed the platter of chicken around the table and said they weren't hungry. Then they sat and watched as their cousins enjoyed every morsel, licking their fingers so they wouldn't miss a morsel. But they knew that my grandmother had also baked an apple pie, and they waited for dessert to be served. After the empty plates had been cleared, my grandmother carried in

the pie, placed it on the table with a flourish, and said, “Now, anyone who wasn’t hungry enough for the main course can’t have dessert.”

Unfortunately, that’s the story of too many people who have a disability. First they don’t get the main course of education, health care and other supports, and then they can’t get jobs, can’t earn a decent income, and can’t live in their own homes – the desserts that most people enjoy.

Now if my grandmother had know the cousins were coming, instead of roasting the chicken she could have made a chicken soup and had enough for everyone. When I told this story in Mexico one mother suggested that my grandmother could have made tacos. My grandmother had never heard of tacos, but the point is, everyone can figure out how to use what they have without excluding anyone.

We need to use the new Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to help create new recipes for our communities – recipes that will include everyone.

We need to share our experiences around the globe and use the knowledge we gain to rise to the challenge issued by Ban Ki-Moon.

Together we have power. We can unite our voices to make global change. We can transform rights into reality.