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Third Committee – Social, Humanitarian & Cultural

This group focuses on the rights people. It wants all people to be free to make their own choices. They believe human rights are important and apply to every person in the world.

The members of this committee discuss human rights. They encourage states to respect the rights of citizens. During the year, they hear a lot of reports from experts and groups about the human rights records of states. Social issues are important to this committee. Questions of crime prevention, drug control, youth, elderly and others are discussed.

This committee works closely with the Human Rights Council. They passed resolutions on the protection of children, how refugees should be treated, and ending racism.

Agenda Item 26.A – Social development including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family

Background – People with Disabilities

This is an agenda item that covers many different issues. Countries often divide this agenda item into four topics: youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family. In 2016, at the 71st session of the UN, they passed 3 different resolutions. In the interest of simplicity, your committee will be focusing on creating a resolution in relation to the situation people with disabilities face.

The term “persons with disabilities” covers a wide range of disabilities. One of the definitions promoted by the UN is “those who have long-term physical, mental intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.” A person can be born with a disability, have an injury or disease that causes a disability, or develop a disability over time. As people grow older and become elderly they often develop disabilities. This is one reason why disability activists argue this topic should be important to all people.

It is important to remember that the disability is not in the person – it is in the society which does not allow the person to enjoy equal rights. Treating everybody the same does not mean everyone is being treated equally. People with disabilities often need supports to engage with society. This can be as simple as making sidewalks with curb cuts so people with physical disabilities can move about easier.

In the past persons with disabilities faced legal discrimination. In the United States, many cities had “ugly laws”. This made it illegal for “unsightly” or “unseemly” people to be go out in public. It was not until the 1970s that many of these laws were revoked. Around the world, people with disabilities continue to be discriminated against.

The United Nations made 1981 the *International Year of Disabled Persons*. In 1982, the attention brought to the problems people with disabilities face encouraged the UN to create the *World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons*. 1983-1992 was the *Decade of Disabled Persons*. This motivated many countries to improve the situation for people with disabilities in their countries. Every year, December 3rd is the *International Day of Persons with Disabilities*.

The language used when referring to people with disabilities is important. Some groups encourage person-first language. This means when you talk about people with disabilities you identify them as a people first. For example, you would say person with autism instead of autistic person. However, some groups reject person-first language. The Deaf community prefers the term deaf person. They do not see deafness as a disability but as a source of pride. They feel they are experiencing the world in a different way than people who can hear. It is not better or worse.

In the past, there were many words used to describe people with disabilities that would now be offensive. Some examples are handicapped, deaf and dumb, lame, mentally retarded or midget. Many of these words were acceptable at one time but became offensive. Sometimes it was because these words were turned into insults. Other words were chosen without asking people in the community who had the disability what their thoughts were. When talking about people with disabilities it is important to use the language that they are comfortable using.

The Sustainable Development Goals 2030 will directly impact people with disabilities. Goal 4 for quality education, Goal 8 for decent work, Goal 10 for reduced inequalities, Goal 11 for inclusive cities and Goal 17 for global partnership all mention disabilities. Since people with disabilities are one of the groups most at-risk this is an important step. We need to state specifically what needs to happen to support them.

People with mental disabilities face a lot of discrimination. Often, other people or governments think that they know what is best for people with mental disabilities. In Canada, a woman was not allowed to accuse a person who hurt her because she did not know what an oath was. The court did not think she could tell that it was a serious situation and promise to tell the truth. The case eventually went to the Supreme Court. In 2012 they decided that people with mental disabilities can be trusted to tell the truth in court. Women with mental disabilities are more likely to be hurt. This ruling will protect other women with mental disabilities.

World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons

This programme was developed in 1982. It encourages countries to look at disabilities from a human rights perspective. This was important because people with disabilities were looked at as things that needed to be “fixed”. Instead, society needs to fix itself so that all citizens can enjoy their human rights. It provides countries with a lot of information about how they can become more inclusive.

Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

This convention was adopted on 13 December 2006. It encourages people to recognize that people with disabilities are people who have rights and can make decisions for themselves. It also highlights areas where the rights of persons with disabilities need to be protected such as in the workforce and during natural disasters. 170 countries ratified the convention. It entered into force on 3 May 2008.

Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

This is a group of independent experts who watch to make sure states who signed the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* are making the right changes and protecting the rights of people with disabilities. Countries write reports every four years on what they are doing. The Committee makes suggestions on how they can improve. It can also investigate complaints made by individuals against a country if the government is not protecting the rights of people with disabilities. They meet in Geneva Switzerland twice per year.

Special Rapporteur on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities

The Human Rights Council passed a resolution to create this position. The Special Rapporteur works with countries to promote good practices to help people with disabilities realize their rights. The Rapporteur also raises awareness about the rights of people with disabilities and makes recommendations on how things can be improved. On 1 December 2014 Ms. Catalina Devandas Aguilar was appointed to be the first person to fill this position.

Disability Statistics

Guiding Questions

1. Research the people with disabilities rights movement in your country. When did your country begin to address these rights?
2. Does your country have problems with discrimination against people with disabilities? What laws does it have to protect people with disabilities?
3. How can states work together to protect the rights of people with disabilities?
4. Read this plain language version of the Convention on the Rights of Disabled Persons: <https://tinyurl.com/j7bx9oh> . Why do the rights of people with disabilities need to so specific?
5. How can countries make it easier for people with disabilities to access to technology that can improve their lives?
6. One of the reasons for discrimination against people with disabilities is because of stereotypes. How can governments help to stop the stereotyping of people with disabilities?
7. People with disabilities is a very diverse group. How might different disabilities require different accommodations in society? What accommodations do you see around you every day?
8. Does the problem exist in your community?
9. Who is working on it? NGOs, not for profits, other groups or individuals?
10. Knowing about this problem, how does it impact your world view?
11. How could you make an impact on this issue through your life choices?

Resources

Title	Hyperlink	How is it helpful?
<i>The National Consortium on Leadership and Disability for Youth</i>	http://www.nclcd-youth.info/index.php?id=01	A website aimed at youth and focusing on disability education.
<i>Division for Social Policy and Development Disability</i>	https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/	Official website of the United Nations for disability issues.
<i>Disability-Inclusive: Sustainable Development Goals</i>	http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/sdgs/disability_inclusive_sdgs.pdf	A poster showing the SDGs that work to improve the lives of people with disabilities.
<i>Disability Rights Around the World: from 1944 to the Present Day</i>	https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/ng-interactive/2016/jun/22/disability-rights-around-the-world-from-1944-to-the-present-day	A Guardian newspaper timeline of all the main disability milestones of the last 73 years.
<i>Disability Statistics</i>	https://www.disabled-world.com/disability/statistics/	An overview of disability statistics from the World Health Organization
<i>Respectful Disability Language: Here's What's Up!</i>	http://www.miusa.org/sites/default/files/documents/resource/Respectful%20Disability%20Language.pdf	A document created by the National Youth Leadership Network to discuss how to use respectful disability language.
<i>International Day of Persons with Disabilities</i>	http://www.un.org/en/events/disabilitiesday/	The official website for the International Day of Persons with Disabilities.
<i>Disability and Rehabilitation</i>	http://www.who.int/disabilities/en/	The World Health Organization's site about people with disabilities.
<i>It's About Ability</i>	https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Its_About_Ability_final_.pdf	A UNICEF booklet that explains the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities