

Advocates Celebrate International Disabled Persons Day by Launching Treaty Ratification Campaign

Washington, DC – December 3, 2007

Disability rights advocates are marking December 3, 2007 - **International Disabled Persons Day** - by launching **RatifyNow**, a global campaign based in the U.S. to maximize the number of nations that ratify the new Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. RatifyNow (www.ratifynow.org) is a unique blend of grassroots activists, disability civil rights organizations, and human rights groups who work in tandem to make sure the Convention's safeguards benefit people with disabilities worldwide.

The twenty-first century's first human rights treaty was adopted by the United Nations a year ago and opened for ratification on March 30, 2007. To date, 118 nations have indicated support of the treaty and interest in ratification. Seven nations have ratified (Croatia, Cuba, Gabon, Hungary, India, Jamaica, and Panama). The treaty becomes legally binding 30 days after the 20th nation ratifies it.

"This treaty will dramatically improve the lives of people with disabilities - but only if we achieve broad worldwide participation," said San Francisco disability rights attorney Michele Magar. "RatifyNow is asking enlightened people everywhere to join in persuading their governments to ratify this treaty."

"Ninety percent of children with disabilities in developing countries receive no education. In far too many nations, people with disabilities lack basic rights, such as the right to own property, marry, work, and retain custody of their children," said Magar. "Because disability discrimination also affects families of individuals with disabilities, the United Nations estimates that this treaty, if broadly implemented, will improve the lives of one quarter of the world's population."

"RatifyNow will provide information and support to the disability community, government officials, journalists, and advocates interested in learning more about the treaty, and why it's so important for nations to ratify it," said Washington, D.C. disability rights attorney Jeff Rosen. "RatifyNow's website will serve as a clearinghouse for information about treaty ratification campaigns, and will provide ratification toolkits and strategies advocates can adapt for use in their own countries. We'll also provide links to information and tools developed by other advocates, as well as relevant studies and reports written by university professors and investigative journalists."

"President Bush's failure to sign and promote the treaty has had a significant impact on people with disabilities," said Rosen. "But we're already working to make sure the next president signs the treaty within the first year of the new administration, and that the Senate ratifies it shortly thereafter."

"We have had good success in starting to get local governments in the U.S. to adopt resolutions endorsing the Convention," said Portland, Oregon disability rights advocate Pam VanderVeer. "We expect RatifyNow to be a resource disability advocates can use to push their government representatives to support treaty ratification."

"We're hoping to work closely with journalists, because the first step is letting the world know this treaty exists," said Magar. "It's a story that deserves broad dissemination, because this treaty guarantees people with disabilities access to education, and the rights to marry, enter into contracts, own property, work, vote, receive information in accessible formats, live in integrated communities instead of institutions, participate fully in cultural and civil life, and be free from discrimination on the basis of disability."

RatifyNow welcomes both individuals and organizations as members, and it costs nothing to join. Organizational members include: **Mental Disability Rights International (MDRI)**, the **American Association of Persons with Disabilities**, the **Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund**, the **National Council on Independent Living**, the **National Organization on Disability**, **People Who, TheUnderRepresented**, and the **United States International Council on Disability**.

Although RatifyNow was begun in the United States, membership is open to individuals and organizations worldwide.