

# United States International Council on Disabilities

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David Morrissey  
*Executive Director*

February 11, 2015

The Honorable John F. Kerry  
Secretary  
United States Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry,

You and the United States International Council on Disabilities (USICD) support the demonstration of American leadership abroad. One way to promote our leadership is to export our expertise in disability rights. USICD stands ready to partner with you to make that export of U.S. disability rights expertise more widespread, constant, and targeted.

In spite of your valuable leadership and the efforts of a great many disability rights supporters, ratification of the Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) has not yet taken place in the United States. Since the United States is not a formal party to the convention, it is vital that our country pro-actively stand up for the concerns of Americans with disabilities overseas and basic human rights of people with disabilities worldwide. USICD looks forward to working with you and the new Congress to secure, recapture, and strengthen the United States' position with regard to disability rights internationally.

The number of people with disabilities around the world is rapidly increasing due to the aging of the world's population and advances in health care that allow people with disabilities to more likely survive accidents and other challenges to their health status. Moreover, the range of conflicts around the world is resulting in more people with disabilities – especially among young people. Despite these trends, U.S. nation building initiatives either wholly fail to, or only tangentially, consider accessibility issues. Numerous countries around the world are trying to address the expectations of their more vocal citizens with disabilities, now empowered by the CRPD. Quite simply, the United States needs to do more.

**We urge you to take four important actions to strengthen U.S. leadership going forward in promoting the rights and concerns of people with disabilities internationally.** First, propose to the Senate

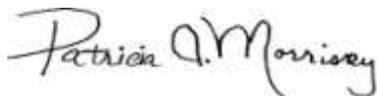
Foreign Relations Committee legislation to make the Office of the International Disability Rights Advisor in the Department of State a permanent entity with an authorization of sufficient standing (e.g., ambassadorship for the director), staff, and funding to influence the Department's position on disability rights, enhance disability rights across the entire U.S. foreign policy community, and establish the Office as a resource for other executive departments and agencies that engage in international work (e.g., Department of Defense). Second, propose to the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee and the House of Representatives Education and the Workforce Committee that they extend the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of disability under section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 to all United States overseas financial commitments. Third, add people with disabilities to the Policy Issues menu on the State Department's website along with women and youth. Fourth, with the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) on July 26<sup>th</sup>, mount a campaign to assist other nations, which do not have it, develop legislation modeled after the ADA.

USICD continues to view the CRPD as a vital priority, but the groundwork needs to be laid for the proper climate to emerge for ratification. By making the Office of the Disability Advisor permanent and extending the reach of section 504 to U.S. funds spent overseas – two concrete steps – that climate will more likely come about. The U.S. will be able to do more and show more of its disability rights leadership.

There is no time to waste. As you build your legacy, please embrace these steps to expand the capacity of the U.S. to influence the quality of life that people with disabilities lead. It is a matter of human rights, but it is much more. People with disabilities and how they are treated in education, employment, health care, housing, transportation, and other areas are a reflection, good or bad, of how others are treated. Please take the broad view and through your testimony on the fiscal year 2016 budget and other opportunities endorse the actions we have suggested. They may well reshape the planet and bring us more peace, collaboration, inclusion, and harmony.

We are ready, willing, and able to work with you on these suggestions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Patricia A. Morrissey".

Patricia A. Morrissey, Ph.D.  
President