



Government of Bermuda
Ministry of Social Development and Seniors

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

by

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International Day of Persons with Disabilities

Wednesday, 1st December 2021

Madam President, the International Day of Persons with Disabilities is observed on the 3rd of December and has been promoted by the United Nations since 1992. The observance of the Day aims to promote the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities at all levels of society and development. Also, it provides an opportunity to raise awareness of the achievements and challenges persons with disabilities face within every aspect of political, social, economic, and cultural life in our community.

Madam President, the UN estimates that approximately fifteen percent of the world’s population, which equates to one billion people living with some form of disability. Disability is defined by the UN as a condition or function judged to be significantly impaired relative to the usual standard of an individual of their group. It is often used to refer to individual functioning, including physical impairment, sensory impairment, cognitive impairment, intellectual impairment, mental illness, and various types of chronic disease.

Madam President, under the Human Rights Act 1981, disability, is defined as the condition of being a “disabled person”. The said Act defines “disabled person” to

include: physical disability, physical reliance for example on a guide dog etc., or has or previously had a mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on the person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Madam President, this year's theme is "Leadership and participation of person with disabilities toward an inclusive, accessible and sustainable post-COVID-19 world". With this theme in mind, the Ministry of Social Development and Seniors strives to make the promises made by the Government, which impact persons with disabilities a reality.

Madam President, the UN highlights the fact that evidence and experience show that when barriers to inclusion are removed and persons with disabilities are empowered to participate fully in societal life, the entire community benefits. Barriers faced by persons with disabilities are, therefore, a detriment to society as a whole, and inclusion and accessibility are necessary to achieve progress and development for all.

Madam President, currently, the Ministry is in the process of working with the UK to have the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities extended to Bermuda. To ensure Bermuda is an inclusive society that recognizes and respects persons with disabilities for their ability not their disability. A formal register of persons with disabilities is being developed. The register aims to assist with data collection to provide projections for support, services, and benefits, which will ultimately assist in improving their quality of life. Also, the register will ensure there is clarity of the current and future needs of persons with disabilities.

Madam President, no person in our society should be left behind or feel ostracized because they have a disability. The Government encourages dialogue on all forms of disabilities. This provides a platform to educate all sectors of our community to ensure persons with disabilities are given the dignity they deserve. I believe that more awareness of persons with disabilities ultimately will lead to more understanding and acceptance.

Madam President, I would like to highlight some events that will be taking place in the community on Friday, 3rd December in recognition of the International Day of People with Disabilities:

- Ageing and Disability Services will be “Taking it to the Streets” with the assistance of Media Mya to engage persons in the City of Hamilton (throughout the community) to start the conversation and bring awareness of persons with disabilities. Also, this provides an opportunity to determine if people in our community can identify unseen/invisible disabilities for example autism.
- The Intellectual Disabilities team at the Mid-Atlantic Wellness Institute (MAWI) will be having their second motorcade. It is intended that the motorcade will start at 11 am from MAWI. More information will be provided through the media. Residents of Bermuda I encourage you to show your support by standing along the motorcade route.
- WindReach (registered charity #92) is hosting a 1-day free virtual conference on zoom from 9 am to 3 pm entitled ‘Common Ground 2021’. The theme of the conference is encouraging advocacy to ensure persons with disabilities are given their right to be heard on issues impacting their lives and across the community. The event will be facilitated and moderated by occupational therapist Alyssa Frick and Paralympian Jessica Lewis.

Madam President, on Saturday, 4th December, Special Olympics Bermuda registered charity #978 will be having their first Polar Plunge at Horseshoe Bay starting at 10 am to 12 pm. The Polar Plunge is a fundraising event for the Special Olympics globally. This event has shown increased popularity in other jurisdictions such as the US and Canada.

Madam President, I encourage people to show support by attending at least one of the events I have mentioned. In closing I quote the British neurologist Oliver Sacks, “I wish for a world (in this case Bermuda) that views disability, mental or physical not as a hindrance, but as unique attributes that can be seen as powerful assets if

given the right opportunities.” Let us come together as a community and provide opportunities for persons with disabilities so we can create a better Bermuda.

Thank you, Madam President.