



Government of Bermuda
Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

by

The Hon. Tinée S. Furbert, JP, MP
Minister of Youth, Social Development and Seniors

International Day of Persons with Disabilities

Friday, 8th December 2023

Mr. Speaker,

This morning I rise as Minister with responsibility for persons with disabilities, to acknowledge the recognition of the United Nations International Day of Persons with Disabilities, which was proclaimed by the United Nations in 1992 and, has been observed around the globe each year on the 3rd day of December.

Mr. Speaker,

This day of acknowledgement aims to raise awareness and promote understanding about the challenges faced by persons with disabilities, while also advocating support for their dignity, their rights, inclusivity, and their overall well-being.

The International Day of Persons with Disabilities provides an opportunity for the Government, the corporate sector, private organizations, communities, all of us, to join together and demonstrate collaborative action for the integration of persons with disabilities in every aspect of political, social, economic, and cultural life within the Bermuda community.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that this is possible with sustained purpose and intention.

Mr. Speaker,

On Sunday, December 3rd 2023, I delivered a public message recognizing the United Nations International Day of Persons with Disabilities to engage the residents of Bermuda and bring them into awareness of this very important day. My message highlighted the theme for 2023, *‘United in action to rescue and achieve the sustainable development goals for, with and by persons with disabilities’*.

Mr. Speaker,

Let me take a moment to share with my Honourable colleagues the sustainable goals that pertain to disabilities. Sustainable Goal #10 – which states: reduce inequality within and among countries by empowering and promoting the social, economic, and political inclusion of all, including persons with disabilities.

And, **Mr. Speaker,**

Sustainable Goal #11 – to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, and sustainable. The Government cannot achieve these goals alone. As a community, it is critical that we are more progressive in our awareness, that we are less judgmental and more accepting, and that we are fully respectful towards persons with disabilities.

Mr. Speaker,

It would be most pleasing if this Honourable House ensured that all persons with disabilities have full access to this Chamber, not just physical access but also virtual access for those who perhaps are hard of hearing and who would like to join in the business of the House when it sits.

Mr. Speaker,

You may be aware that by profession I am an Occupational Therapist and having worked with persons with disabilities, I am keenly aware that often when we live with a disability, an impairment or even a health condition, we like to keep it private and do not disclose; to avoid experiencing any potential stereotyping, most specifically in a small Island like Bermuda.

Therefore, I challenge everyone to partner together and share a vision for Bermuda that is inclusive for all. In doing this, we can collectively progress towards not only achieving the sustainable development goals, but we can break down barriers, we can challenge stereotypes and we can create a Bermuda where persons with disabilities can fully participate and thrive.

Mr. Speaker,

As part of Bermuda commemorating the United Nations International Day of Persons with Disabilities, this week Wednesday, December 6, the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors held a panel discussion that focused on **‘Understanding Disability in the Workplace’**. The panellist of five included:

- Lisa Reed, Executive Officer of the Human Rights Commission;
- Sacha Richardson, Chairwoman of the Disability Advisory Council, Disability Advocate and Charity Consultant;
- Malika Cartwright, Director of the Department of Workforce Development;
- Sherrie Lynn Lilley, Mental Health Counsellor and Executive Director of Inspire Bermuda; and
- Keith Simmons, Disability Advocate.

Mr. Speaker,

One of the highest reporting complaints noted in the Human Rights Commission Annual 2022/23 was discrimination due to disability. We know that the Human Rights Act provides an avenue for individuals to challenge discrimination in employment on the grounds of disability. Therefore, the panel discussion targeted what tools employers can use and what measures employers can implement to support qualified persons with disabilities in accessing employment opportunities. The panel members emphasized that employers should not be afraid to hire persons with disabilities but to reach out to their human resource professionals, review their hiring practices and ensure that there is access to reasonable accommodation.

Mr. Speaker,

It is important that the hesitancy and fears to hire persons with disabilities are alleviated and employers are equipped to know how to integrate disability into the workplace. The five panel members shared a wealth of knowledge, information, experience and key tools for employers to be supportive in the workplace. The panel discussion was enhanced as two of the panel members with disabilities shared experiences of how they had to advocate for their self in the workplace.

Mr. Speaker, the panel discussion was streamed and can still be viewed on the Government's Facebook page, and its CITV Bermuda YouTube Channel by those who want to know more about the various pathways to creating a workplace culture that celebrates diversity.

Mr. Speaker,

Let me shift to state that Bermuda requires a centralized repository for the collection of accurate and current data on persons with disabilities. A centralized repository will provide key information about the types of disabilities persons are challenged with which will in turn identify gaps in the areas of programmes, services and special equipment needed for persons with disabilities. The Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors is currently progressing the development of a National Disability Register, which will be a first for Bermuda. Such a Register will include information and data collection using digital technology and will ultimately facilitate informed policies and decisions in key areas such as health care, education, employment, and accessibility to advance inclusivity in Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker,

To ensure a quality Disability Register aligned with international best practices and standards, the Ministry sought technical support from the United National Development Programme (UNDP) country office in Jamaica. In October this year, we met with representatives of UNDP and discussed introducing a national disability register and undertaking a needs assessment for the development of an App to be used by persons with disabilities. The UNDP subsequently established a meeting for Ministry technical officers to meet with members of the Jamaica Council for

Persons with Disabilities as Jamaica had already developed, launched and maintained a national disability register. The meeting was valuable and insightful in providing a path for the establishment of a Disability Register for Bermuda. The UNDP Office also extended financial support for developing the Bermuda project.

Mr. Speaker,

This is good essential work. The establishment of a Disability Register for Bermuda will certainly support our disabled population; and the ultimate development of a disability App provides an opportunity for the Government to collect, manage and utilize data related to persons with disabilities so they can access information and services. Empowering persons with disabilities through accurate data representation is crucial for promoting and encouraging their active participation in society. This initiative further aligns with the Government's five-year National Plan for Adults with Intellectual Disabilities and their Families which was launched in May this year.

Mr. Speaker,

The Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors is committed to this inaugural work and will provide this Honourable House and the general public with updates as we progress in the building of our first-ever National Disability Register for Bermuda.

In closing, I once again challenge Bermuda to partner together and share a vision for Bermuda that is inclusive for all. In doing this, we can collectively create a Bermuda where persons with disabilities can feel safe, fully participate and thrive in our Community.

Thank you, **Mr. Speaker.**

