



The Honorable Harry Reid  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
U.S Capitol Building, Room S-221  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
U.S Capitol Building, Room S-230  
Washington, DC 20510

December 3, 2012

Dear Senators Reid and McConnell,

On the occasion of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, Amnesty International USA writes in strong support of U.S. ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (“CRPD”). The CRPD affirms and protects the rights of individuals with disabilities, guaranteeing equal treatment and non-discrimination. We urge the Senate to ratify the treaty without delay and without amendments, and to commit to fully implementing the treaty.

The CRPD would ensure equal protection for persons with disabilities, guaranteeing them the rights to accessibility, non-discrimination, and access to liberty and justice, among many other important human rights. One of the key guarantees in the treaty is “freedom from exploitation, violence and abuse,” which members of the disabled community experience at a disproportionate rate. In the United States in 2010, serious violence (defined as rape/sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault) accounted for about 50% of violence against persons with disabilities in the U.S., up from 36% in

2009<sup>1</sup>. The CRPD would provide a roadmap to end these and other abuses by requiring the U.S. to “promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity.”

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states that all people “are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” Amnesty International USA believes that all people, regardless of disability, should be equal under the law and able to enjoy the full range of their human rights. These rights include economic self-sufficiency, independent living, and inclusion and integration into all aspects of society including education. The Americans with Disabilities Act (“ADA”) was an essential step in guaranteeing these rights to those in the United States living with disabilities. Ratification of the CRPD would help protect these rights and allow persons with disabilities to live their life with the human rights guaranteed them by the UDHR.

Amnesty International USA is concerned that the U.S. has conditioned its previous treaty ratifications by attaching reservations, understandings, and declarations, or RUD’s, to various treaty articles. The effect has been to limit the application of treaties by ensuring that they confer no greater protection than already exists under U.S. law. While the U.S. has many laws and mechanisms to protect human rights, there are areas where U.S. law or practice falls short of international treaty provisions.

Amnesty International USA calls on you to urge your fellow Senators to remove the RUD’s attached to the treaty in the Senate mark-up. Restrictive interpretations of treaties inhibit effective implementation of their provisions and undermine their purpose and objectives. Accordingly, the U.S. should ratify the CRPD without any amendments.

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<sup>1</sup> Harrell, Erika. "Crime Against Persons with Disabilities, 2008-2010 Statistical Tables." *U.S. Department of Justice*. U.S. Department of Justice, Oct. 2011. Web. <<http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/capd10st.pdf>>.

Thank you again for addressing this critical human rights issue. We look forward to continuing to work with you and appreciate your leadership on this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Suzanne Nossel', written in a cursive style.

Suzanne Nossel  
Executive Director, Amnesty International USA