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INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF DISABLED PERSONS

Note verbale dated 17 November 1981 from the Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

The Permanent Representative of the United States to the United Nations presents her compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and, with reference to General Assembly resolution 35/133 on the International Year of Disabled Persons, adopted at the thirty-fifth session of the Assembly on 11 December 1980, has the honour to transmit an Overview of the International Year of Disabled Persons in 1981, prepared by the United States Federal Interagency Committee for the International Year of Disabled Persons - 1981.

It is kindly requested that the above-mentioned paper be circulated as an official document of the General Assembly under agenda item 30.

(Signed) Jeane J. KIRKPATRICK

ANNEX

**Overview of the
International Year of Disabled Persons - 1981
and
Disability
in the
United States**

**Prepared by:
Federal Interagency Committee
International Year of
Disabled Persons - 1981
October, 1981**

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The International Year of Disabled Persons has initiated a host of Federal policies, activities, and involvement in communities across the United States. It has drawn attention to issues, problems and activities of worldwide concern, established long term national objectives, and has encouraged the development of programs designed to improve the lives of 450 million disabled citizens throughout the world.

The United States has actively advocated the civil rights of all of the world's citizens. It has supported a wide range of services to meet the needs of the 36 million disabled persons residing in this country. For these reasons, the United States co-sponsored the Libyan resolution which proclaimed 1981 the International Year of Disabled Persons.

The United States responded to the United Nations' plan by establishing a Federal Interagency Committee which is chaired by the Secretaries of the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Education, and the Department of State. These co-chairpersons guide the work of the Federal Interagency Committee, which has representatives from approximately 45 departments, agencies, and commissions of the Federal Government.

The activities of the Federal Interagency Committee are complemented by the efforts of the U.S. Council for IYDP, a private sector consortium of businesses and private organizations. The U.S. Council is promoting a partnership between disabled and nondisabled persons, between public and private sector organizations, and between the state and local governments. The Council's three programs -- the Community Partnership Program, the Corporate Partnership Program, and the Challenges of the New Decade Program -- are developing community support and corporate participation in the Year's activities. The Council is acting as a catalyst and promoter of national efforts and local community activities in celebration of the Year.

The Federal Interagency Committee and the U.S. Council are encouraging the full participation and integration of persons with disabilities into society during this International Year. This mutual effort has resulted in an International Year of partnership between governmental, private, and voluntary organizations.

Activities related to IYDP goals have been proposed by the participating Federal departments, agencies, and commissions. A common objective of the agencies is the improvement and expansion of programs concerned with affirmative action, training and awareness, and public information and outreach.

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Affirmative action programs: a) set goals for the recruitment, placement, and promotion of disabled persons within the agency workforce; b) assess and modify facilities and programs which provide physical and informational access; c) develop advisory committees and self-help groups of disabled persons to support affirmative action initiatives; and d) identify and remove barriers to the selection and training of disabled employees.

Training and awareness activities include programs which promote and foster attitudinal changes, such as: a) training managers and supervisors on disability topics; b) informing disabled employees and potential employees of their civil rights and educational opportunities; c) developing and disseminating public information and media materials on disability; and d) developing conferences, seminars, and workshops which highlight the abilities, achievements, and needs of disabled people.

Public information and outreach activities; a) provide information on disability topics to the general public and Federal agency employees, using alternative formats to disseminate information to sensory impaired persons (Braille, tapes, captions, interpreters for the deaf); and b) highlight the achievements and needs of disabled persons in newspapers, magazines and public service announcements.

It is important to note the Federal legislation which has enabled disabled persons to participate fully in society. While the first Federal laws assisting disabled citizens date back to the early years of the Republic, prior to World War II the statute books contained relatively few acts authorizing special benefits for handicapped persons -- other than disabled war veterans. However in recent years, particularly since the early 1960's, significant Federal legislation affecting handicapped persons has been enacted.

In this paper it would be impossible to explore the more than 60 pieces of key legislation that affect the legal rights and benefits of the mentally and physically disabled. Laws that have a very significant impact on American disabled persons are the Rehabilitation Acts and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act.

The origins of the Federal-state vocational rehabilitation program can be traced back to the National Civilian Vocational Rehabilitation Act, also known as the Smith-Fess Act of 1920, when Congress enacted the first civilian program for assisting disabled

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persons in regaining work skills. The scope of the initial legislative authority was subsequently enlarged in 1943, 1954, 1965, 1967 and 1968. The Act has been expanded to include services to persons with a wide array of handicapping conditions, and in recent years to focus increased attention on the needs of severely disabled individuals. This increased attention to the severely disabled has enabled many persons who formerly resided in institutions or residential centers to lead much more complete lives within their respective communities.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 authorizes the Federal government to provide monies for the training and placement of mentally and physically disabled persons into remunerative employment. A wide variety of service, demonstration, training and research grant programs are established under the Act, including a major Federal and state program, to assist in accomplishing this goal.

In 1975 the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, (Public Law 94-142) was passed by the Congress of the United States. This act expanded previous legislation relating to the education of both physically and mentally disabled children. It now includes a multi-billion dollar federal commitment to assist state and local educational agencies in providing appropriate educational services for handicapped children. Prior to the passage of this act the majority of disabled children were often segregated in special schools, or in extreme cases received no formalized education. It has now enabled disabled children to be "mainstreamed", that is, to attend the regional public school systems in their respective communities.

The majority of recent legislation has focused on those persons whose limitations have placed dramatic restrictions on their day-to-day activities, both physical and mental. The concern for severely handicapped individuals has given birth to the "independent living movement" in the United States. This movement encourages disabled people to exert control over their personal living arrangements, to participate in peer counseling, to acquire independent living skills, and to actively participate in the administration of the support services they need to live and function as independently as possible within their communities.

The numerous laws that have been passed in the United States directly or indirectly affecting handicapped persons have touched on a wide variety of issues. These include education, employment, health (both physical and mental), housing income maintenance, civil rights, social services, transportation, and vocational rehabilitation. Many of these laws have been passed in recent years and the long-term effects are yet to be seen. It can be said that disabled persons have a long way to go in becoming fully integrated in our society. However, the progress that has been made is something that the United States can be very proud of.

On February 6, 1981 President Ronald Reagan signed a proclamation declaring 1981 the International Year of Disabled Persons in the United States. His words project America's stand and the direction we should follow:

"We seek, in the 1980s, an era of national renewal, an era that will set loose again the energy and ingenuity of the American People. Today there are 35 million disabled Americans who represent one of our most underutilized national resources. Their will, their spirit, and their hearts are not impaired, despite their limitations. All of us stand to gain when those who are disabled share in America's opportunities..."

President Reagan emphasized the need for Americans, both within the government and in the private sector, to combine efforts in fulfilling the objectives of the International Year and to encourage activity and plans that will have a significant impact in years to come. Undoubtedly, the over 400 Federal programs and projects and the 1800 community groups that have been organized to implement the Year's objectives will together have such an impact.
