



## Political Rights of Persons with Disabilities

December 3<sup>rd</sup> is the United Nations International Day of Disabled Persons. This year's theme ***Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Action in Development*** recognizes the rights of persons with disabilities and the need for them to play an active and meaningful role in development for their community. To highlight the importance of this day and the year's theme, the Canadian Association of Independent Living Centres (CAILC) is releasing a series of four themed fact sheets throughout the month of November reflecting the four pillars of rights necessary for true equity for Canadian with disabilities.

*Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression.<sup>1</sup>*

*Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or freely through chosen representatives.<sup>2</sup>*

*Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country.<sup>3</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Article 19, United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights

<sup>2</sup> Article 21, United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights

<sup>3</sup> Article 21, United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights

### Fact:

- ❖ It has been said that **persons with disabilities** represent the **world's largest minority**, with an estimated **500 million** persons with disabilities worldwide.<sup>1</sup>
- ❖ In 1982 the introduction of the **Charter of Rights and Freedoms** guaranteed all Canadian citizens had the **right to vote**. However, because of wording around "**reasonable limits**" many **persons with disabilities still found themselves excluded from Canada's electoral process** and their rights as Canadian citizens.<sup>2</sup>
- ❖ Until The **Canada Elections Act** was officially changed in **1993**, persons with disabilities were still disenfranchised and confined to institutional settings were excluded from voting.<sup>3</sup>
- ❖ In terms of the political rights of persons with disabilities, Provincially and Territorial, there are **still barriers preventing full participation** in the political process. **Quebec** and **New Brunswick** still have statutory **provisions that disqualify some persons with disabilities from voting** in elections.<sup>4</sup>
- ❖ In **2004** Conservative candidate **Steven Fletcher** became **first quadriplegic member of Parliament**.
- ❖ Recent American studies indicate persons with disabilities are **20% less likely to vote**. In addition, **voters with disabilities** are far more likely than their non-disabled peers to **encounter and/or expect barriers at polling stations**.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Akerberg, A. (2001) Human rights and Persons with Disabilities. Report from the SHIA human rights and disability network.

<sup>2</sup> CBC (1988) Lifting Restrictions on Mental Patients.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Prince, M. (2004) Persons with Disabilities and Canada's Electoral Systems. Electoral Insight.

<sup>5</sup> Schriener & Kruse Study Shows Persons with Disabilities Less Likely to Vote.

### Solutions:

- ❖ In a recently released international study on politics and disability, **people with disabilities in government positions** reported that **legislative and programmatic improvements** have helped the situation of persons with disabilities in their respective countries.<sup>1</sup>
- ❖ Heightened awareness and an increased understanding of disability issues among non-disabled peers were cited as benefits of having persons with disabilities in positions of governance.<sup>2</sup>
- ❖ **CAILC** and its **Independent Living Resource Centres** are **run by and for persons with disabilities**, promoting governance structures that promote persons with disabilities as leaders and ensure persons with disabilities remain experts on issues that affect the disability community.
- ❖ **CAILC** and its **Independent Living Resource Centres** can help individuals, communities, and governments identify leaders with disabilities who can help enable political inclusion.

<sup>1</sup> 2005 Change from Within: International Overview of the Impact of Disabled Politicians and Disability Policy on Governance. The World Institute on Disability.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid