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The European Disability Forum (EDF) is an umbrella organization representing more than 50 million people with disabilities in the European Union. It is first and foremost a Human Rights organization, founded on the principles of non-discrimination and equal opportunities. Established 10 years ago by disabled people and the families of disabled people unable to represent themselves, EDF defends their interests towards the European Union institutions, including the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and all the other relevant authorities.

Before the adoption of the United Nations Convention, accessibility was purely a wish, a demand, a desire, a dream. Now that the Convention has been adopted, accessibility has become a fundamental right, recognized as such in Article 2 (Definitions), Article 9 and Article 21 (Freedom of Expression, and Opinion and Access to Information) of the UN Treaty. Access, usability and affordability of information and communication technology by persons with disabilities are not concessions and the continued exclusion of persons with disabilities from equal access to ICT is clearly now identified as a form of discrimination.

Given its global nature, there is a need for a common vision on ICT. Internationally agreed goals must be defined and implemented through accessible design, the production of accessible ICT equipment and of course, services for disabled persons. Universal services and obligations must also be met.

There is no doubt that the adoption of the Convention presents a tremendous challenge to the world disability movement, which will have to redefine its way of acting, of bringing together plans of action, of forming alliances. Accessibility has to be considered in view of the Convention, which must be used as a platform to establish and carry out, from the disability point-of-view, a world wide campaign to promote legislation, to promote regulation, to promote enforcement and compliance.

Now that accessibility has clearly been identified, rights cannot be left to voluntary exercises. It is a great opportunity for all actors to put together a world wide initiative with, for and by disabled people's organizations, to promote a new era in accessibility, ICT and in all other areas covered by Article 9 of the Convention.

Let me share with you what we have done in Europe in a very important effort that concerns accessibility and non-discrimination. In 2004, we decided to organize and carry out a campaign to make the link between the funding provided by the European Union to the Member States and the principles of non-discrimination and accessibility. This key campaign concerns the European Structural Funds, which for the period 2007-2013 represent more than 336 billion euros. Almost 44 billion euros are distributed every year through the Structural Funds to the Member States. Many regions of the European Union utilize this funding as the main source of public funding. It is therefore a tremendous source of public investment in the 27 Member States.

Our demand during this campaign was very simple: "from words to deeds. Let's stop the rhetoric about accessibility and take action".

Thanks to our intensive work, Article 16 of the Structural Funds General Regulation very clearly states that all the projects that will be funded from 2007 to 2015 should respect the principle of non-discrimination and the accessibility criteria. EDF is now working at Member States level to make sure that what we have incorporated in the regulation will become a reality. It will be delivered under the form of accessible programs, ICT, infrastructure, and transportation systems among others and will therefore have a tangible impact for disabled people in many EU countries.

In conclusion, the role of public authorities and the role of the State are indispensable. Legislation, regulation and of course, enforcement of these regulations are absolutely crucial to make society accessible. The lack of accessibility is a democratic deficit. Accessibility is a political issue, and it is the duty of the State to guarantee that rights are respected and that people with disabilities can exercise their rights. For the disability movement, it is a tremendous challenge to put in place a broad alliance with public authorities, with industry, with trade unions, with others that support the full implementation of Article 9 and other provisions of the Convention, without any restrictions. The Convention will produce change not only for this generation, but for the next. It is the duty of this generation, within the industry, among policy makers, within the disability movement, to create the provisions and the necessary requirements for the success of this paradigm shift in the way the community looks at disabilities.