

**Remarks**  
**Ambassador D. Brent Hardt**  
**Disability Persons Network Donation**  
**October 24, 2012, 2:00 p.m.**  
**William Carmichael Community Centre, Seafield Village**  
**West Coast Berbice**

Mark Archibald – Chairman

Members of the Disability Persons Network – Region 5

Good Afternoon.

It is great to be back in Berbice. I am especially pleased to be here on this occasion to visit our friends from the Region 5 Disabled Persons Network. A few months ago, I received a letter from Mr. Archibald and the Region 5 Disabled Persons Network seeking our help to develop a bed sheet production project that the organization wanted to launch. After a review of the project and a meeting with the enthusiastic Region 5 Disabled Persons Network team, when they came to Georgetown to meet with our Public Affairs Section, we realized this was an excellent program led by determined and dedicated individuals. We commend the executives of the Disabled Persons Network for this initiative, and we are only too pleased to be able to support your efforts.

Today, the U.S. Embassy is pleased to donate three sewing machines to the Disabled Person's Network as part of the bed sheet production project. I understand that the bed sheets will then be sold to the Ministry of Health, regional hospitals, hospitality businesses, and the local community. In addition to the sewing machines, my Embassy is also delighted to be able to provide the Disabled Persons Network with some Braille books to support reading and writing for members who may be blind or visually impaired.

We are very happy to do our part to support the Disabled Person's Network's bed sheet project because, in doing so, we are supporting a remarkable civil society organization that is fighting for the rights of a critical group of often underserved citizens. The Disabled Persons Network in Region 5 is a caring and compassionate group of community members that forms part of the broader Guyana National Disabled Persons Network. The Network advocates for the rights of persons with disabilities, both locally and nationally, and it regularly organizes craft projects and social activities. It currently has 45 members and it

manages its own affairs and finances through an elected committee, meeting twice weekly to find ways to provide support to the community.

The United States shares your belief in the importance of promoting and protecting the rights of persons with disabilities – both in our own country, and throughout the world. Disability rights are basic human rights, not special rights. Persons with disabilities have the same rights as all other people to non-discrimination, access, equality of opportunity, inclusion, and full participation in society. These are the basic principles underlying United States’ policies on persons with disabilities, as well as the international principles that many nations around the world support.

The disability rights movement in the United States began in the 1960s, encouraged by the examples of the African-American civil rights and women’s rights movements. People with different kinds of disabilities – physical and mental handicaps, along with visual and hearing-impairments and different essential needs -- came together to

fight for a common cause. The specific goals and demands of the movement were: equal opportunities in independent living; employment; education; housing; freedom from abuse, neglect, and violations of human rights; and accessibility and safety in transportation, architecture, and the physical environment.

As a result of the advances that have been achieved through the work of the disability rights movement, major disability rights legislation was passed in the 1970s through the 1990s in the United States. This legislation, especially the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, has made a significant difference in the lives of persons with disabilities in the United States. Access to public areas such as city streets and public buildings and restrooms are some of the more visible changes brought about in recent decades. Adaptive technologies, enabling people to work in jobs they could not previously have pursued, have helped to create greater access to employment and to foster economic independence. Improved access

in the classroom has expanded educational opportunities and independence for people with disabilities. Most importantly, we have also changed attitudes and perceptions, so that people with disabilities are accepted simply as people, and their contributions as members of society are recognized.

As part of our foreign policy, the United States works throughout the world to remove barriers and create a world in which disabled people enjoy dignity and full inclusion. Discrimination against people with disabilities is not simply unfair; it hinders economic development, restricts democracy, and erodes the sense of justice at the root of a society. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is the international agreement that seeks to ensure that people with disabilities and people without disabilities are treated equally. To date, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has 154 signatories and 125 ratifications.

The Convention, adopted on December 13, 2006, guides stakeholders in the exercise of their rights. It also defines the actions governments must take to help all people with disabilities realize their rights. The rights in this Convention are not new. They are the same human rights recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and other international human rights treaties. The Convention guarantees that these rights are respected for people with disabilities.

For its part, Guyana has made significant strides in recent years in passing legislation to ensure equality and integration of differently-abled people into its society. The Guyana Persons with Disability Act was passed in the National Assembly and assented to by former President Bharrat Jagdeo in November 2010. The Guyana Persons with Disability Act provides for the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities, facilitates the enforcement of those rights, eliminates discrimination on the basis of disability, and provides for the welfare, rehabilitation, and registration of persons with disabilities. The passage of the Act puts

Guyana in line with the international community, and provides the platform for Guyana to be able to ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Important progress has also been made in recent years with the establishment of organizations such as National Commission on Disability, The Guyana Council of Organizations for Persons with Disabilities, and the Guyana Society for the Blind. All off this reflects the growing commitment among the Government of Guyana and civil society to expand policies, programs, and support to address the needs of persons with disabilities in Guyana. The National Commission on Disability has worked extensively to empower people with disabilities, by helping them to know and understand their rights and to build their capacity to advocate for the fulfillment of these rights.

In addition to highlighting civil society's role in the promotion of disability rights, the Disabled Persons Network's bed sheet production project also promotes entrepreneurship and economic prosperity through

the creation of small business enterprises. Bed sheet production serves as both an income-generating activity for the DPN organization while also giving members a specific, marketable skill set. Apart from learning the knowledge of the craft, DPN members will also gain experience on all aspects of running a successful business, including marketing, sales, customer service, and accounting. The bed sheet production project will enhance the confidence of Network members in their work and enable them to become better integrated into mainstream community life. In addition to the primary beneficiaries, I know that the Disable Persons Network in Region 5 hopes that the project will inspire other disabled persons in Guyana to become entrepreneurs.

So as we make this donation today, we are pleased that our support will directly benefit the members of the Disabled Persons Network. And we are even more pleased that we can help in your organization's mission to inspire other persons with disabilities and civil society groups in Guyana to live full and successful lives. Thank you.