



**STATEMENT OF WADE HENDERSON, PRESIDENT & CEO
THE LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE ON CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

**HEARING BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
ON**

CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2013

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Corker and members of the committee: thank you for holding today's hearing on the importance of ratifying the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, I am pleased to provide this written statement for inclusion in the record.

The Leadership Conference is the nation's oldest and most diverse coalition of civil and human rights organizations. Founded in 1950, The Leadership Conference seeks to further the goal of equality under the law through legislative advocacy and public education. We work to build an America as good as its ideals. The Leadership Conference consists of more than 200 national organizations representing persons of color, women, children, persons with disabilities, organized labor, the elderly, gays and lesbians, and many religious groups. The Leadership Conference has worked to pass landmark federal legislation to protect the civil and human rights of all Americans, including laws to ban discrimination on the basis of race, national origin, sex, age and disability. Among them: the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1960, and 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and subsequent amendments, the Fair Housing Act of 1968, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009, and the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009.

The Leadership Conference also led the fight to pass legislation containing strong disability protections, such as the Rehabilitation Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Most recently, The Leadership Conference coordinated the successful campaign to pass the ADA Amendments Act of 2008. The law overturned several Supreme Court decisions that reduced protections for certain people with disabilities – including people with diabetes, epilepsy, heart disease, mental disabilities, and cancer – who were originally intended to be covered by the ADA. We mobilized a diverse and passionately committed coalition of organizations, including a true partnership between the civil and human rights community and the business community, which was a key to this success.

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We are pleased to support U.S. ratification of the CRPD. This nondiscrimination treaty seeks to ensure that countries across the globe provide people with disabilities with the same rights as everyone else, so that they can live full, satisfying, and productive lives. This global treaty was inspired by and embodies the bedrock American ideals that form the basis of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) — nondiscrimination, equality, accessibility, and respect for the inherent dignity of all persons, including persons with disabilities.

U.S. ratification will benefit millions of Americans, particularly those veterans, business leaders, scientists, students and other Americans with disabilities who seek to live, work or travel abroad. According to the latest census data, 18.7 percent of all Americans have some type of disability. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2011 American Community Survey One-Year Estimates, American Indians/Alaskan Natives experience the highest rate of disability at 16.3 percent; African Americans at 13.9 percent; Non-Hispanic Whites at 13.2 percent; Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone at 8.8 percent; Hispanic or Latino (of any race) at 8.4 percent; and Asian alone at 6.4 percent. In addition, females experience a rate of disability at 12.4 percent and males at 11.9 percent. Furthermore, persons 65 years or older experience the highest rate of disability at 36.6 percent; persons 18 to 64 years at 10.2 percent; persons 5 to 17 years at 5.2 percent; and persons under 5 years at 0.8 percent. It is estimated that four out of 10 American travelers or their companions have disabilities, yet they still face barriers and discrimination abroad.

The CRPD has been ratified by 138 countries. It was negotiated by the George W. Bush administration and signed by President Obama in 2009. And though the treaty secured a majority of votes in 2012, it fell short of the necessary two-thirds votes required for ratification in the lame duck session. Advancing the rights of persons with disabilities has always enjoyed bipartisan support in the United States. In this case, we are simply seeking to extend our tested and effective approach of inclusion and nondiscrimination to individuals with disabilities currently living in isolation in countries around the world.

In addition to providing clear benefits for Americans with disabilities and American businesses, the CRPD will benefit millions of individuals with disabilities around the world. It is estimated that there are approximately one billion people with disabilities around the world and that 80 percent of the people with disabilities live in developing countries. Modeled and inspired by the ADA, the CRPD takes an approach of inclusion and accessibility that can provide direction and guidance for the integration of people with disabilities into all societies. And U.S. ratification of the CRPD could encourage other countries to take advantage of the many technological innovations developed here in the United States to assist people with disabilities, allowing them to work together with our businesses to find ways to adapt and replicate their products in ways that are affordable and appropriate to the various country contexts.

The Leadership Conference is committed to ensuring that our country maintains its leadership role in promoting the rights and dignity of all people with disabilities. We have much experience—through the ADA, our technology, and our creative know-how—to share with the rest of the world. And as was the case with the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, the CRPD is supported by a broad group of disability, veterans, and civil and human rights organizations as well as by prominent members of the business community. We believe that by ratifying the CRPD, we will continue our bipartisan tradition of



advancing human rights globally. At the same time, we will reaffirm our respect for those Americans disabled through war and conflict and other incidents. Simply put, ratification will allow us to stand with the rest of the world in advancing the civil and human rights of people with disabilities around the world.

Thank you again for holding today's hearing, and for giving us the opportunity to share our views. We look forward to working with the Committee on advancing ratification of the CRPD.