

Hon. Ruth Dyson

2007 Franklin Delano Roosevelt International Award Ceremony

Speech notes for address at the afternoon tea hosted by Peter Hughes.

Rau rangatira maa,

tenei te mihi ki a koutou i runga i te kaupapa o te ra.

Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa.

[Distinguished guests, greetings to you gathered here for this purpose today. Greetings once, twice, three times to you all.]

Good afternoon, it is a pleasure to be here.

As we celebrate the International Day of Disabled Persons, what better way to mark this occasion, than to announce New Zealand's outstanding achievement in being awarded the 2007 Franklin Delano Roosevelt International Disability Award. It is my honour to announce New Zealand as the recipient of this prestigious award.

Nearly 20 years ago, New Zealand was the first country in the world to incorporate access rules into its revised building code to significantly improve the lives of disabled people, by making new and renovated structures more supportive of their needs. These new access standards were written into the act because in the early 1970's the government had the foresight to pass an act that would make better provision for financial and other assistance, in respect of disabled people. The Disabled Persons Community Welfare Act 1975 also makes provision for supporting the voluntary and private organizations that were providing facilities for 'community welfare' as it was then known. That was the beginning; the start of an amazing story of change. Thanks to the early visionaries who proposed this act, and thanks to all the dedicated people who believe in what the act was setting out to achieve; we are here today—celebrating one of the highest achievements, the Franklin D Roosevelt award, in recognition of a tremendous weight of valuable work that has put disabled people on a more equal footing with other New Zealanders.

New Zealand has more to do certainly, but we are recognizing and meeting the challenges that are part of the story of building a more inclusive society—a society where disabled people can lead everyday lives.

It is notable that for the first time in history the judges had no dispute over who should receive the Franklin D Roosevelt Award. New Zealand clearly stood out as more than worthy. We receive this award in recognition of our nation's accomplishments in promoting and implementing the spirit of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Sponsored by the World Committee on Disability and the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute, this annual award acknowledges noteworthy progress in achieving full participation of citizens with disabilities. The award praises New Zealand's leadership role in developing legislation and programmes to protect the rights and meet the needs of disabled people. There is praise also, for New Zealand's public awareness campaigns, which have made a significant impact on the acceptance of people who experience mental illness.

The Governor General will attend the official 2008 Roosevelt award ceremony in New York where he will receive a bust of President Roosevelt on behalf of the New Zealand people. The bust will be displayed in Parliament Buildings – a reminder of our success and of our ongoing commitment to improving the lives of people with disabilities. A cash prize of US \$50,000 also forms part of the award. I am delighted to confirm that the prize will go to an outstanding disability sector non-government organisation, selected by the Minister for Disability Issues and following an open application process. The application form is available now. You can collect the forms and details from us here today, or from the Office for Disability Issues and its website. We welcome applications from NGO's that can demonstrate a positive commitment to enhancing the lives of disabled people and their families.

New Zealand is making solid progress towards achieving a more inclusive society, where people with disabilities are valued on equal terms with other New Zealanders. Our success is of course the sum of many parts and I would particularly like to acknowledge the hard working people at

the Office for Disability Issues, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the disability sector NGOs. Their optimism, determination, and dedication have in no small way contributed to a particularly stunning achievement: the negotiation and signing the 2007 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Convention is an empowering document, which was signed by a record 81 countries, and represents a huge advancement for people with disabilities. The overarching purpose of the Convention is to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all disabled people, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity.

I was fortunate to represent NZ at the historic signing of the UN Convention in March this year and was enormously proud of the leadership role New Zealand played in the negotiating process, under the skilful guidance of Ambassador Don MacKay. Our significant involvement in negotiating the Convention—the first Human Rights Agreement this century—within a record minimum timeframe of just four years, was instrumental in New Zealand’s receiving the 2007 Franklin D Roosevelt Award.

On this International Day of Disabled Persons, we have a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the progress and accomplishments of disabled people. Thirty years ago many disabled people lived in institutions, separated from the wider community. Now we have developed the policies, the legislation, and most importantly the will, to support and encourage disabled people to take an active role; to participate fully in the ordinary, and the not so ordinary activities of everyday life. All of us here share a vision for an inclusive society, where discrimination and barriers to participation are ever diminishing. We are well on the way towards achieving this, and can hold up the Roosevelt Award as evidence for how far we have come.

The Roosevelt Award is one highlight in a series that defines 2007 as a watershed period for disabled people in NZ. I want to mention three other highlights that show we are making a positive difference to the lives of disabled people in NZ:

1. In 2001, New Zealand became one of only a few countries to have a national disability strategy that requires the government to plan and implement a comprehensive approach to the inclusion of disabled people. The strategy provides a practical and solid foundation for working through the challenges disabled people face daily, and continues to underpin many of our recent success stories.
2. On March 27 2007, we repealed the Disabled Persons Employment Promotion Act 1960, bringing us in line with current human rights laws. For 47 years, disabled people had not enjoyed the same employment rights or protections as other New Zealanders, and repealing the old Act has brought about a much more level playing field. This is a really important step towards ensuring that the abilities, potential, contribution, and rights of people with disabilities are recognised and valued.
3. Also in March 2007, NZ was a party to the aforementioned signing of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, an amazing achievement for NZ and for the 80 other nations involved.

Too many people to mention deserve credit for the Roosevelt award we celebrate today, and for their part in ensuring disabled people have the opportunity to enjoy the same everyday choices, responsibilities and rights as any other person living in New Zealand. To all of you, please accept my warmest congratulations and thanks for your extraordinary efforts in the face of ongoing challenges. Whilst we have come a long way, there is still much to do. And the government is committed to supporting you in meeting the challenges ahead, and going the distance.