



**CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS  
WITH DISABILITIES**

**Neglected and Abused Abroad:  
A Look at the Severe Mistreatment of Individuals  
with Disabilities Around the World and  
How the U.S. Can Help**

Created by the International Task Force of the  
Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities

**September 2013**

## **U.S. Experience Protecting the Rights of Individuals with Disabilities**

Laws that protect the rights of people with disabilities are imperative. Without such laws, people with disabilities have been victims of extreme discrimination, abuse, and neglect. In the United States, for example, prior to the creation of laws that now better ensure the rights and safety of people with disabilities, abuse and blatant discrimination was allowed to occur. Large state institutions for individuals with disabilities such as the infamous Willowbrook - a New York State supported institution for people with intellectual disabilities which held over 6,000 residents in a facility meant for only 4,000 - were allowed to exist. In the 1970's, Willowbrook residents were found naked, held in filthy conditions, and provided with limited chances to interact with others. Residents sat around with nothing to do. One staff member was responsible for 30 to 40 residents, each having a number of needs and behavioral issues.

As a result of the terrible conditions at Willowbrook and other institutions, and the treatment and discrimination faced by people with disabilities, a number of laws were passed in the United States to protect the rights of people with disabilities. These laws included the Rehabilitation Act in 1973, the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (DD Act) in 1975, and the Civil Rights of Institutionalized Persons Act in 1980. As part of the DD Act, Congress created the Protection and Advocacy (P&A) system to investigate institutions to ensure the safety of individuals with disabilities, and to provide legal advocacy to protect their rights.

Following passage of these early disability rights laws, the United States made progress to better ensure the equal treatment of Americans with disabilities and improve the lives of those living in institutions. The key law developed in the United States to protect the rights of people with disabilities is the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which represents a bill of rights for Americans with disabilities. The ADA was enacted by Congress with overwhelming support from both parties and signed into law by President George H.W. Bush on July 26, 1990. To ensure that the intent of the original Act would be fulfilled, in 2008 Congress overwhelmingly passed, with unanimous support in the U.S. Senate, the Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act. The ADA requires that people with disabilities be given the same opportunities as others without disabilities in employment, public programs, public accommodations, and public transportation.

In 1999, the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Olmstead v. L.C.* (527 U.S. 581) that the ADA requires that people with disabilities be provided services in the most integrated setting appropriate to their needs. The decision in *Olmstead* requires states across the United States to provide appropriate services and supports in the community so that children and adults with disabilities are not unnecessary institutionalized in order to receive these services, and can live as equal members in the community. As Justice Ginsburg of the Supreme Court wrote, "confinement in an institution severely diminishes the everyday life activities of individuals, including family relations, social contacts, work options, economic independence, educational advancement, and

cultural enrichment.” Now in the United States unnecessary confinement in an institution is “discrimination” against people with disabilities and a violation of their civil rights.

The passage of laws in the United States over the past forty years have created better protections, greater rights, and a more dignified standard of living for people with disabilities. Though problems still exist in America for people with disabilities and current laws need to be diligently enforced, U.S. laws have set the world standard for protecting the rights of people with disabilities.

As the United States actively works towards ensuring basic human rights for U.S. citizens and legal residents with disabilities, and for foreign tourists with disabilities visiting the United States, people with disabilities in countries around the world continue to face harsh mistreatment and abuse which their governments either fail or refuse to prevent. This report highlights just a few examples of the serious abuse, neglect, discrimination, and unequal treatment of people with disabilities that persist in other countries. Some of these examples bring to mind the horrific conditions found in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s, before enactment of U.S. civil rights laws to protect individuals with disabilities.

Preventing the abuse and mistreatment of individuals with disabilities highlighted in this report is possible by global adherence to the standards of the **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**. Commonly called the “CRPD,” this disability rights treaty applies the same human and civil rights standards which exist in the United States to nations which adopt the treaty. The United States has not ratified the CRPD.

At the end of World War II, the United States became a leader in the world promoting political and civil rights, the rule of law, democracy, and the protection of personal security and freedom. Since the 1970s, and more recently with the Americans with Disabilities Act, the United States also became a leader in adopting laws to protect individuals with disabilities. Just as the United States ratified treaties on civil and political rights, the elimination of racial discrimination, and others, the United States needs to ratify the CRPD. People with disabilities deserve the same level of support and leadership – and no less - from the United States on disability rights as the United States has provided for the realization of other human rights.

**About CCD:** The [Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities](#) (CCD) is a coalition of approximately 100 national disability organizations working together to advocate for national public policy that ensures the self determination, independence, empowerment, integration and inclusion of children and adults with disabilities in all aspects of society.



The [CCD International Task Force](#) envisions a global society in which individuals with disabilities have the rights, freedoms, and opportunities to fully participate in all aspects of civic life and to exercise individual decisions concerning their own lives. Click on the icon to the left or here to visit the [Task Force website](#).

## Abuse and Mistreatment of People with Disabilities across the World and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Below are eight examples of severe abuse and discrimination of individuals with disabilities from different regions of the world reported within just the last decade. Certainly many more incidents of mistreatment go uninvestigated and unreported. The **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)**, requires nations who have accepted or “ratified” the treaty to work towards protecting the rights of individuals with disabilities in their countries.

Currently, 133 nations and the European Union have ratified the CRPD. By accepting the CRPD, these nations agree to work together to protect the rights and well-being of individuals with disabilities.

Human rights, like those in the CRPD, are realized when nations encourage, support, and in some cases work to pressure other nations to adhere to the rights contained in a treaty. In other words, a nation which has ratified a human rights treaty works - through offers of technical assistance, diplomatic discussion, and other persuasive means - to influence another nation which has ratified the same human rights treaty to uphold its’ obligations. No international court, body, or committee can force a country to follow obligations under most human rights treaties. This includes the CRPD, since no international court or committee can force a nation to adhere to the disability rights in the treaty. It is, however, through cooperative assistance among nations, diplomatic pressure as necessary, and public exposure of abuses if required, that rights under the CRPD can and will be realized. The United States, which is years if not decades ahead of most other nations in creating rights and protecting the treatment of individuals with disabilities, has diminished ability to influence other nations to follow the CRPD until ratified by the U.S. Senate.

The CRPD is less than 10 years old, and countries which have adopted the treaty are working to improve the lives of persons with disabilities. For example, in Peru the national congress approved a new disability law in line with the CRPD which includes a right to integrated education for individuals with disabilities and an obligation that transportation be accessible (*source: [www.cbm.org/Peruvian-Congress-approves-disability-law-372083.php](http://www.cbm.org/Peruvian-Congress-approves-disability-law-372083.php)*). In India, upon ratification of the CRPD, the country undertook a complete rewrite of laws protecting people with disabilities. Instead of the previous charity-based legal protections, the new law in India now seeks to empower people with disabilities and ensure they can live independent and productive lives (*source: [www.criticaltwenties.in/lawthejudiciary/drafting-indias-new-law-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities](http://www.criticaltwenties.in/lawthejudiciary/drafting-indias-new-law-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities)*). Similarly in Kenya, though problems still exist, a new 2010 constitution explicitly prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities under the law where such previous protections did not exist (*source: [drpi.research.yorku.ca/Africa/resources/EACDisabilityPolicy/Page2/Part3](http://drpi.research.yorku.ca/Africa/resources/EACDisabilityPolicy/Page2/Part3)*).

In some counties which have ratified the CRPD, however, conditions have not yet improved and need the leadership of the United States. Below are just a few examples.

## Ghana



Ghana ratified the CRPD in 2012, but Ghanaian citizens with disabilities still face many violations of their basic human rights. For example, people with mental illness suffer from severe abuse at psychiatric hospitals and so-called “healing centers” or “prayer camps.” While at these healing centers, many individuals with mental disabilities are chained to trees and even denied water as part of the “healing.”

According to a Human Rights Watch report, about 1,000 residents live in squalid, overcrowded quarters in Ghana's three psychiatric hospitals. Patients face physical and verbal abuse, and some are given electroshock therapy without anesthesia because, according to the head of one hospital, “we don’t have a machine and personnel.” The abuse is even worse in healing centers, which lack government oversight. Many people with mental disabilities are sent to the camps, usually by their family members to be “cured” by self-proclaimed prophets through miracles, prayer, and fasting. In most prayer camps, residents are only allowed to leave when the prophet deems them healed. At the Mount Horeb Prayer Camp in 2012, according to Human Rights Watch, about 120 of the 135 residents were chained to trees or to the walls inside cell-like rooms, 24 hours a day, sometimes for months at a time. Most of the chains measured only a few yards long. They bathed, defecated, urinated, changed sanitary towels, ate, and slept on the spot where they were chained.



Click on the photo icon or [here](#) for photos of the abuse in Ghana.

Articles 15 and 16 of the CRPD requires that nations which adopt the treaty take measures to prevent the torture, abuse, and inhuman and degrading treatment of individuals with disabilities. Fortunately in the United States, such abuse would violate a number of federal criminal and civil statutes, as well as state laws. If the United States ratified the CRPD, it could pressure and work with countries like Ghana to uphold their commitment to ensure the rights of persons with mental disabilities are respected under Articles 15 and 16.

Source: Human Rights Watch (Medi Ssenooba). ‘Like a Death Sentence’: Abuses against Persons with Mental Disabilities in Ghana. October 2, 2012. Available at: [www.hrw.org/reports/2012/10/02/death-sentence](http://www.hrw.org/reports/2012/10/02/death-sentence).

## Kenya



After a 10 year old Kenyan girl with a disability was raped, her mother filed a police report. When attempting to file the report, the mother was told by the police that “such cases cannot be properly supported in court- as the girl is deaf and disabled... [and] cannot be able to give evidence in court.” When the case eventually reached the court, it could not be heard because sign language interpreters were not available to assist. Kenya ratified the CRPD in 2008.

Article 5 of the CRPD requires a nation to recognize that individuals with disabilities are entitled to equal protection under the law. Article 13 of the CRPD requires a nation to provide equal access to the justice system for all people with disabilities. Under Article 13 a nation also needs to provide accommodations so that a person with a disability, whether a victim or a witness, can participate effectively in the justice process. Article 16 of the treaty requires proper investigations and prosecution of violence against and exploitation of individuals with disabilities.

In the United States, the Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits unequal treatment of people with disabilities. United States ratification of the CRPD would allow the U.S. to raise with the Kenyan government the failure to provide children, like the one in this case, and her family with equal access to the justice system. The United States could also share years of expertise in providing equal access to justice to help Kenya prevent future violations of Articles 5, 13, and 16.

Source: Serges Alain Djoyou Kamga, Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria. *The Rights of Women With Disabilities in Africa: Does the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa Offer Any Hope?* February 2011. Available at [www.centerwomenpolicy.org](http://www.centerwomenpolicy.org).

## Mexico



A report by Disability Rights International and Mexico’s Commission for the Defense and Promotion of Human Rights contains a number of stories of abuse and neglect of persons with mental and intellectual disabilities. Investigators found patients lying naked or half clothed on concrete floors at two psychiatric hospitals. The smell of human waste at one

facility was overwhelming. Investigators saw patients urinate on the floor and walk around in the same spot, and observed a patient pick-up and lick a food

“The government of Mexico has no record as to how many people are detained in its psychiatric facilities, orphanages, shelters, and other institutions for people with disabilities.” – Report from Disability Rights International

container from an open sewer while staff failed to intervene. At another facility, a patient was seen tied to a bench and unable to walk to the bathroom, while an elderly woman in a wheelchair was allowed to sit in her own waste.

Investigators also reported on children with intellectual disabilities being abandoned at a private facility without any documentation on their diagnosis or even their names. Two girls at the facility reported having to work without pay, and were provided no services to be able to leave the house.

Articles 16 and 17 of the disability rights treaty requires a nation to work to protect individuals with disabilities from abuse, and to respect their physical and mental integrity. Mexico has ratified the CRPD. Major media outlets in the United States for over a decade have reported on the mistreatment of people with disabilities in Mexico, but also recognized that the United States does not have a tool to effectively share information about deinstitutionalization techniques with Mexico. The CRPD is that tool.

By ratifying the treaty, United States diplomats could more easily raise the mistreatment of individuals with mental and intellectual disabilities with Mexico, and offer technical assistance on providing treatment and services to individuals in the community. Even prior to the Supreme Court decision in *Olmstead*, states around the United States gained significant experience in providing services and supports to people with disabilities outside of the institution, experience which could be shared with Mexico as a CRPD treaty partner.

Source: Disability Rights International and Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos. *Abandoned & Disappeared: Mexico's Segregation and Abuse of Children and Adults with Disabilities*. June 2011. Available at: [www.disabilityrightsintl.org/media-gallery/our-reports-publications/](http://www.disabilityrightsintl.org/media-gallery/our-reports-publications/).

## Paraguay



In 2003, disability rights investigators found two teenage boys with disabilities in an institution who for more than four years had been locked in six-by-six foot isolation cells, naked, and without access to bathrooms. According to the investigators, “the cells reeked of urine and feces, and the cell walls were smeared with excrement. Each boy spent approximately four hours every other day in an outdoor pen, which was littered with human excrement, garbage, and broken glass.” In addition, another 458 people were

found detained in unclean institutions without medical, dental, and psychiatric support.

Paraguay ratified the CRPD in 2008. Proper implementation of the CRPD can ensure that maltreatment of this kind no longer happens to children with disabilities in Paraguay. Under Article 7 of the CRPD, a



An individual with a mental disability locked in a cell in Paraguay. Photo by Eugene Richards, Many Voices, Inc., courtesy of Disability Rights International.



nation agrees to ensure children with disabilities enjoy the same basic human rights and fundamental freedoms as children without disabilities. Articles 15, 16, and 17 of the treaty require a nation to work to prevent abuse and mistreatment, and to protect the physical integrity of individuals with disabilities. In the United States, laws such as the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act, the Protection and Advocacy of Individuals with Mental Illness Act, and state and federal laws prohibit and seek to prevent such horrible mistreatment. Agencies such as the U.S. Department of Justice, state Protection and Advocacy agencies, and other state and local agencies investigate, enforce the law, and attempt to prevent this type of abuse. With ratification of the CRPD, the United States could offer Paraguay, as an equal treaty partner, assistance based on decades of experience protecting persons with disabilities from abuse and neglect.

Source: Disability Rights International. *Disability Rights International's Work in Paraguay*. October 2013. Available at: [www.disabilityrightsintl.org/work/country-projects/paraguay/](http://www.disabilityrightsintl.org/work/country-projects/paraguay/).

## **Russia**



In Russia many people with disabilities are like prisoners inside their own homes, unable to go outside because of a lack of basic accessible facilities in cities and towns. A man from Moscow paralyzed from the waist down and who uses a wheelchair has faced such struggles throughout his life. In one incident after answering a knock on the door he was attacked and dragged from his wheelchair. Fearing further attack, and because the front door of his apartment is too narrow for a wheelchair to go through, he has not left his apartment for ten years. Other disability advocates

in Russia report that many people with disabilities rarely leave their homes because of inaccessible buildings, public sidewalks without curb cuts, and public transportation that is not accessible.

Russia ratified the CRPD in 2012. Under Article 9(1)(a) of the treaty, nations must work to provide “buildings, roads, transportation and other indoor and outdoor facilities, including schools, housing, medical facilities and workplaces” accessible to individuals with disabilities. Articles 19 and 20 call on nations to recognize the equal rights of persons with disabilities to live independently in the community. The isolation of individuals with disabilities in Russia illustrates that there is still much to be done in that nation.

In the United States, the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act require equal access to public services for people with disabilities. Through ratification of the CRPD, the United States could, as an equal treaty partner, offer to assist Russia adhere to the accessibility standards in the CRPD, the same standards set in the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Source: BBC (Richard Galpin). *Russia's Disabled Suffer Neglect and Abuse*. October 12, 2009. Available at: [news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8302633.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8302633.stm); and *Campaigning for Disabled Russians* (video). Available at: [news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8299325.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8299325.stm).



## Rwanda



A 30-year-old genocide survivor with a mental disability was arrested by the police for arguing with people who wanted to put him in chains. The individual lost his job in the army because of, and was known in his village to have, a mental disability. Rwanda ratified the CRPD in 2008, yet on January 19, 2013 the man was subjected to severe abuse by the police. After getting into an argument and altercation with neighbors, a crowd started beating him, chained his legs and arms, and the police took him to a police station.

Following the arrest, the man was held in a dark cell for almost three weeks. His arms and legs were chained until becoming infected. The police ignored the recommendation of a nurse to take him for medical treatment, and when treatment was finally sought ten days later, a psychiatric hospital refused to admit him. Eventually the man was taken to another hospital, where both his arms were amputated because of the infection from the restraints. Charges have been brought against the police and other officials. With proper implementation of the CRPD, especially Articles 15 and 16, as well as Article 13(2) which requires appropriate training of police and prison officials on disability issues, such horrific abuse of individuals with disabilities can be prevented.

Many police forces around the United States are experts on how to handle issues involving people with mental disabilities and ensure compliance with U.S. laws. If the United States ratifies the CRPD, it can more easily approach Rwanda about such human rights abuses, and provide technical assistance to police on how to assist individuals with mental disabilities in crisis situations.

Source: National Organization of Users and Survivors of Psychiatry. *Torture of Person with Disability in Rwanda*. March 2013. Available at: [www.panusp.org/wnusp-statement-on-un-sr-torture-mendez-report-of-4-march-2013](http://www.panusp.org/wnusp-statement-on-un-sr-torture-mendez-report-of-4-march-2013).

## Serbia



Horrendous instances of injustice and ill-treatment of persons with disabilities in institutions in Serbia have been reported since 2007. A report by disability rights investigators found that in one government institution, rows upon rows of young people diagnosed with Down Syndrome were tied to their beds or cribs. One man with Down Syndrome, twenty-one at the time of the report, was said to have been restrained for eleven years. Other young people and adults were confined to their beds with labels describing various disabilities such as “blindness, deafness, cerebral palsy, hydrocephaly and mental retardation.” The lights in the institution remain off most of the time leaving the room dark, even in the middle of the day. There is usually only one staff member for 25 people, with no stimulation for the patients for a better quality of life.

By joining over a hundred nations, including most of Europe, and North and South America in ratifying the CRPD, the United States would be in a much stronger position to hold Serbia responsible to adhere to Articles 7, 15, and 16 of the treaty which prohibits the neglect, mistreatment, and torture of individuals and children with disabilities. United States ratification would also show the world that the United States will not tolerate the abuse of children with disabilities.

Sources: Disability Rights International. *Serbia, Torment not Treatment: Serbia's Segregation and Abuse of Children and Adults with Disabilities*. November 2007. Available at: [www.disabilityrightsintl.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/Serbia-rep-english.pdf](http://www.disabilityrightsintl.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/Serbia-rep-english.pdf). Dan Bilefsky. *Mentally Ill in Serbia Are Abused, Report Says*, November 14, 2007. Available at: [www.nytimes.com/2007/11/14/world/europe/14serbia.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/14/world/europe/14serbia.html?_r=0).

## Turkey



It is common practice in Turkey's mental health system to use electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) on persons with mental disabilities in its "unmodified" form without anesthesia, muscle relaxants, or oxygenation. The practice of unmodified ECT creates a climate of fear that permeates public psychiatric facilities and scares many patients from any treatment or care. One 28 year old former psychiatric patient subjected to "unmodified" ECT described it as the most painful thing he had ever experienced. The man was held down, had cotton put in his mouth, and got a jolt of 70 to 110 volts. He said "I felt like dying." Turkey could prevent such abusive practices by adhering to the CRPD which it ratified in 2009.

Under Article 15 of the CRPD a nation agrees to work to ensure people with disabilities are free from torture or cruel and inhuman treatment. By ratifying the CRPD, the United States can both pressure Turkey to stop using "unmodified" ECT, and serve as a guide for Turkey as they work to uphold standards to provide proper treatment for their citizens with disabilities.



For more information on the violations and work to protect the rights of persons with disabilities in countries across the world, visit the [Disability Rights International](http://www.disabilityrightsintl.org) website.

Source: Disability Rights International. *Behind Closed Doors: Human Rights Abuses in the Psychiatric Facilities, Orphanages and Rehabilitation Centers of Turkey*. September 26, 2005. Available at: [www.disabilityrightsintl.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/turkey-final-9-26-05.pdf](http://www.disabilityrightsintl.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/turkey-final-9-26-05.pdf).

## The Experience of an American Student who is Deaf Traveling to Ghana

*When a nation properly adheres to the CRPD, accessibility in public transportation, public facilities, and other public spaces should improve, benefiting individuals with disabilities traveling to that nation. Read below about the difficulties faced by Anais Keenon, a student in International Development at Gallaudet University who is deaf and traveled to study in Ghana during the summer of 2011. From the moment she arrived she faced a multitude of obstacles because of her deafness, showing that Ghana, which has ratified the treaty, needs more motivation and support to adhere to the treaty.*

“When I landed at Kotoka International Airport in Accra, there were no signs or written instructions for me to see and follow when going through customs, so I struggled to figure out the paperwork and to communicate with the airport staff. Communication struggles continued because public transportation systems had no accessible features for people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing.” Although Ms. Keenon tried to find ways to communicate using signs or hand gestures, she realized “most people had no clue what was happening and backed away from me; eventually I had to stop using signs in public.” Further complicating Ms. Keenon’s experience was the fact that neither American Sign Language (ASL) nor Ghanaian Sign Language (GSL) interpreters were available for hire, thereby making it necessary for important information to be constantly repeated.

Though Ms. Keenon faced many difficult experiences because of her deafness, she notes “I was only a visitor - life is beyond difficult for most deaf Ghanaians.” During interviews with Ghanaians who are deaf, Ms. Keenon learned of their daily challenges. For example: “Two deaf men I met, who were in their early 20s, couldn’t spell - which is crucial for communication in ASL or GSL.” This problem is similar to that of many Ghanaians who are deaf, whom Ms. Keenon discerned “genuinely, desperately wanted a ‘real’ education, but they were being taught how to make brooms and farm instead.” In fact, Ms. Keenon says that most Ghanaians do not think people who are deaf “can marry, have children, drive cars, or be ‘normal.’”

Since her travels, Ghana has ratified the CRPD. If the U.S. ratifies, Ms. Keenon believes this will be “a strong indication that Ghana will need to start integrating its citizens with disabilities, and promote more accessible options.” As mentioned throughout this report, by ratifying the CRPD, under international human rights law, the United States would be in a much stronger position to persuade, and if necessary pressure, Ghana and other nations which have adopted the CRPD to follow the provisions of the treaty. As Ms. Keenon asserts: “if Ghana actually starts following the CRPD treaty, it will make a world of difference not only for Ghanaians with disabilities but for tourists with disabilities. I should have the same right as other American citizens to fully enjoy the cultural experiences and treasures of different countries.”

## How Would United States Ratification of the CRPD Encourage Other Nations to Protect the Rights of People with Disabilities?

Under international law, a human rights treaty is an agreement among nations. By accepting or “ratifying” a human rights treaty, a nation says its’ government will uphold the rights in the treaty for those who are in that nation’s territory. By ratifying a treaty, a nation also expects other nations which have adopted the treaty to uphold those rights within that nation’s borders. A nation which accepts a human rights treaty is in a much better position under international law to provide leadership, training, technical assistance, and if necessary apply pressure, to another nation to keep their agreement to protect the rights of its citizens and those visiting the country.



An emaciated teenager found by Disability Rights International (then known as Mental Disability Rights International) at an adult psychiatric facility in Romania. *Photo by Eric Rosenthal, courtesy of Disability Rights International.*

The United States has ratified a number of international human rights treaties including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, known as the “ICCPR” in 1992; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in 1994; and in 2002 two Protocols prohibiting child prostitution, pornography and the selling of children, and on the involvement of children in armed conflict. All of these treaties were approved unanimously by members of both parties in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. President George H.W. Bush supported the ICCPR, while Presidents Clinton and George W. Bush supported the two Protocols concerning children. To be ratified in the United States, two-thirds of the U.S. Senate, or 67 Senators, must vote to adopt a treaty. As said before, the United States has not yet ratified the CRPD.

By adopting the CRPD, the United States can better influence other CRPD nations to live up to their agreement to protect individuals with disabilities. Once ratified, the United States can become a leader and use much stronger diplomatic pressure in relations with the 133 nations<sup>1</sup> which currently have ratified the CRPD, to address any mistreatment of individuals with disabilities, and seek improvements in the conditions of their lives. Offers of technical assistance by the United States, for example, on how to protect and provide enforcement for the rights of peoples with disabilities, will be more readily accepted by other nations with the United States as a treaty partner. Once the CRPD is ratified, the United States can speak more strongly on the international stage about the treatment of people with disabilities with other nations which have adopted the treaty.

---

<sup>1</sup> The number of nations and the European Union which have ratified the CRPD as of August 2013.

## **Conclusion**

The abuse, mistreatment, and neglect of people with disabilities is a world-wide problem - similar to what United States citizens with disabilities experienced during much of the last century. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is designed to address these horrific situations. By ratifying the CRPD, the United States can better assist the international community to protect the rights and improve the lives of persons with disabilities.