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## Convention adopted

A United Nations (UN) committee involving all the countries of the UN and over 800 representatives of the international disability community has adopted an International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

It is the first comprehensive human rights treaty agreed at the UN for 15 years. It joins six other binding human rights treaties as part of the wider body of international human rights law.

Office for Disability Issues Director Jan Scown says agreement on the Convention reflects an important shift in governments' approach toward disability issues, and can be used to leverage domestic policy change.

"It should have a positive impact

on the enjoyment of basic human rights by an estimated 650 million disabled people worldwide. We hope this will be the beginning of a new non-disabling era.

"New Zealand is very proud to have made a decisive contribution to the drafting, negotiating and finalising of this Convention. New Zealand's Ambassador to the UN Don Mackay chaired the committee with support from our Government, expertise from our Office, support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and creative and expert input from the New Zealand disability non-government organisation (NGO) community and Human Rights Commission."

This is the first UN convention to have been negotiated with the full



*New Zealand Ambassador to the UN and chair of the committee developing the Convention, Don Mackay, is congratulated by World Federation of the Deaf delegates Marrku Jokinen (left) and Liisa Kauppinen.*

participation of NGOs and disability-based organisations.

It now needs approval by the UN General Assembly and needs to be signed and ratified by New Zealand and other states in the UN.

The text of the Convention can be read at [www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/rights/ahc8adart.htm](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/rights/ahc8adart.htm)

## Easy access tracks promoted

The Department of Conservation (DOC) has produced two Easy Access Tracks brochures, one for the North Island and one for the South Island.

The featured tracks highlight the opportunities for all people to access scenic and interesting places all over New Zealand.

Some tracks are easily accessed independently by people using wheelchairs or mountain buggies, while others have a gradient which may mean they require assistance.

The brochures describe the tracks'

features, surfaces and nearby facilities. Information panels grading the accessibility of the tracks are also being provided beside the tracks listed in the brochures.

The brochures offer a snapshot of what is available. There are many more tracks and more detailed descriptions including site maps in local site brochures. Most local brochures are available on the DOC website [www.doc.govt.nz](http://www.doc.govt.nz) or at visitor centres nationwide.

Some of the symbols DOC uses are listed on the right.



Suitable for wheelchairs, mountain buggies and walkers.



Suitable for wheelchairs, mountain buggies and walkers. Gradient varies. Some assistance required.



Suitable for mountain buggies and walkers.



Short walks relatively barrier free. They may have steps, steep or narrow sections.



Walking tracks are mostly well formed. They may have steps, steep or narrow sections.



Toilets available with disabled access unless otherwise stated.

## Funding for New Plymouth District Council disability projects

The New Plymouth District Council has allocated funding for disability projects in its 10-year Community Plan 2006-2016.

The decision was based on a submission by the Disabilities' Issues Working Party, led by members Marion Wellington and John Major. The working party was tasked by the Council to identify projects for funding.

Council Manager of Customer and Regulatory Services, Martin White, says a disability strategy will be developed in conjunction with the working party.

"This will raise the profile of disability issues in a co-ordinated fashion. It is exciting because the funding has been set aside and the programmes will be implemented based on consultation with disabled people," he says.

## Japanese Deaf students visit

The Office for Disability Issues recently hosted three Japanese Deaf students, in New Zealand to learn about the New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) Act.

They were also looking at community support for Deaf peoples' equal participation with others in society.

Ayumi Akamatsu (Nihohukushi University, Aihchi), Ayumi Uthiyama (Doho University, Shizuoka) and Eriko Yamagishi (Ristumeikan University, Kyoto) were sponsored by the Duskin AINOWA Foundation under its 'Study Abroad Leadership Programme'.

Duskin AINOWA is a non-profit organisation which assists disabled people to achieve full participation in society, without discrimination.

There are about 320,000 users of Japanese Sign Language (JSL) and, like New Zealand, too few interpreters (around 1,200). Japanese students have difficulty accessing interpreters and rely on note-takers during lectures.

The Japanese students congratulated New Zealand on passing the NZSL Act and would like to see their own JSL recognised as an official language in Japan.

The students also visited the Deaf Studies Unit at Victoria University and other Deaf community organisations.

## Innovative software donated to disabled people

IBM is donating its web adaptation software to organisations advocating for disabled people.

IBM's New Zealand Corporate Community Relations Manager Debbie Noon says IBM fully supports the New Zealand Disability Strategy and its vision for a fully inclusive society. "The web adaptation software is one

way in which we can contribute to help make this a reality."

The software supports those with vision and/or motor skill impairments.

It can transform the web in a way that makes it easier to read and to navigate. People with low vision can magnify web pages, change the colour of text and background, turn off animation and sharpen images to greatly improve readability. The browser, mouse and keyboard are also easier to use.

IBM donates the software to registered non-profit organisations with more than 100 members. To date it has been donated to SeniorNet, the Stroke Foundation of New Zealand, the Blind and Low Vision Education Network of New Zealand, and the Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind.

SeniorNet's National Co-ordinator Grant Sidaway says his members are greatly benefiting from using the software. "Technology skills are needed to perform several basic tasks today, from gathering information to making purchases, and for some these tasks are more difficult than they need to be. Web adaptation technology is helping us level the playing field."

Islay Maclean is one user of the software, which she received via the Stroke Foundation. She has impaired vision as a result of a stroke. "You have no idea the help it is to me. I listen to a voice and click with the mouse. I would encourage people to give it a go. It will open up a whole new world to you."

For more information contact:  
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From left checking out the web adaptation software are: IBM's Debbie Noon, SeniorNet's Geoff Smith, Minister for Disability Issues Ruth Dyson and SeniorNet's George Harvey.