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November 28, 2014

## **International Day of Persons with Disabilities: December 3, 2014**

Working people understand that we do not live in a fair society and that this lack of fairness extends into our workplaces. Discrimination based on disabilities is a daily reality and we have a responsibility to confront it.

Our communities and our workplaces are designed with a fictitious “normal person” in mind as if having a disability weren’t in fact, normal.

Most of us will require some kind of accommodation at some point in our lives. When we do, we will need supports in place: we will need job security; we will need the assurance that we won’t become forgotten members of society; we will need medical coverage; and we will need time off and will need understanding. These are the things we fight for. If we are seeking employment, we want assurances that we won’t be stereotyped – or not hired – because of our disability.

As trade unionists, we take a working-class perspective on disability. People with disabilities need and deserve meaningful work – we all need to feed ourselves and our families and we all deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. We will not allow our worth as people to be measured by how well we fit into a flawed mold that discludes many.

The annual observance of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities was proclaimed in 1992 by the United Nations General Assembly. The aim is to promote an understanding of disability issues and mobilize support for the dignity, rights and well-being of persons with disabilities. It also seeks to increase awareness of gains to be derived from the integration of persons with disabilities in every aspect of economic, political, social, and cultural life.

The denial of opportunities and negative attitudes are the main reasons people with disabilities are disproportionately absent from the workforce.

Unifor structures include Workers with disABILITIES Committees at Regional and National levels. Unifor negotiates language to ensure the equality of access differently abled people need and deserve. All Unifor local and workplace representatives take a weeklong human rights course in order to be educated on equity issues including ability.

Employers often resist employing persons with disabilities believing they will be unable to perform their roles and/or that it will be too expensive. This attitude is rooted in fear and stereotyping, focusing more on the disability than on the abilities of the individual.

Evidence and experience shows that when barriers to inclusion are removed, persons with disabilities are empowered to participate fully in societal life and their entire community benefits. Barriers faced by persons with disabilities are, therefore, detrimental to us all.

Unifor demands that the Government of Canada fully implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Canada signed the Convention in 2009, yet has taken few steps to implement this human rights treaty.

The commemoration of International Day of Persons with Disabilities provides an opportunity to address this exclusion by focusing on promoting accessibility and removing all types of barriers in society to ensure that persons with disabilities can exercise their human rights and participate fully in the economic, political, social and cultural lives of their communities.

For more information on the International day of Persons with Disabilities please visit <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=111>. For more information on the United Nations Enable Film Festival please visit <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=1562>.

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