

**Ms. Marlee Matlin**  
**Statement on the**  
**Occasion of International Day of Persons with Disabilities 2008**  
**Theme: “*Dignity and Justice for All of Us*”**

Across the globe, many men and women enjoy freedom, dignity and equal rights. At its basic level, this means freedom of movement, the right to express opinions and thoughts, and assemble with others. Each and every one of us is entitled to these fundamental rights and freedoms, regardless of race, colour, language, religion, opinion or gender.

In today’s world of work, many people with disabilities enjoy equal rights – the freedom to choose their work, earn a decent living, learn useful skills and be included in the wider workforce. But for the vast majority, this isn’t so. Millions face prejudices and barriers to work, discrimination when they have a job and now, in these turbulent economic times, the fear that they may be the first to lose their jobs.

This is not only unfair. It is unjust. We know that people with disabilities can be just as productive as those without disabilities. Yet discrimination persists and is widespread. In addition, even when they get a job the workplace environment may be inaccessible or the conditions of work discriminatory. This isn’t only a problem for people with disabilities. It’s a problem for all of us. The annual global cost of excluding people from the workplace is estimated at between US\$ 1.37 to nearly US\$ 2 trillion in lost annual global domestic product each year.

This year’s theme for the International Day of Persons with Disabilities is “*Dignity and justice for all of us*”. This means dignity, non-discrimination, equality, fairness and universality, for everyone, everywhere and always. It helps unite us in the fight against discrimination, poverty and stigma. And it helps us work together to bring down the barriers to equal access and a better life.

Now more than ever, creating the right environment for people with disabilities is critical to our economies and our future. We need decent work for people with disabilities, so we can all play a role in the global economy recovery. If we all work to

fight discrimination against people with disabilities, we can all enjoy dignity, justice and equality. We all stand to gain.

END