

Canadians join Government and Civil Society Leaders to Advance UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

An International Conference on Guardianship, Legal Capacity and Supported Decision-Making as it affects persons with disabilities took place in Budapest October 18 -19. The conference follows the Republic of Hungary's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the first European country to do so. It brings together officials from the Republic of Hungary, civil society groups, and international partners and experts. The conference is identifying new directions for law and policy reform to enable people with intellectual and other disabilities to secure full legal rights, and access the support needed for this purpose, as provided for under the new UN Convention.

ÉFOÉSZ, the Hungarian family-based association that advocates for the rights of persons with intellectual disabilities, hosted the conference. Canadian Diane Richler, President of Inclusion International, a federation of over 200 national member associations advocating for people with intellectual disabilities and their families, was invited to explain the importance of the UN Convention. She called on civil society and governments "to set solid benchmarks to guide implementation of the Convention so that we can put law reform into practice, so that our aspirations see real results in the lives of people with intellectual disabilities and their families." Csizmár Gábor, Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour described the government's plans for implementation.

Supported by the Ministry of Justice Affairs and Policy, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, the Hungarian National Museum and others, this conference provided opportunity for Canadians to share innovations in law and policy from Canadian experience. Michael Bach, Executive Vice-President of the Canadian Association for Community Living, sister organization to ÉFOÉSZ, shared models of support already in place in Canada, and identified lessons learned that could be drawn upon in the process of law reform in Hungary. Other guest speakers came from Germany and from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights.

Diane Richler was encouraged by the collaboration demonstrated at this conference between civil society organizations and governments within Hungary and internationally. "We need these kinds of partnerships and international cooperation to share experience and build knowledge about innovative laws, policies and practices that bring the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to life."

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For further information on this conference, contact Piroska Gyene, President of ÉFOÉSZ at (061) 411 1356.