International Day of Persons with Disabilities

December 3, 2015

Around the world over a billion people are living with disabilities and far too many of them face economic, political and social exclusion. Barriers to participation in political, social, economic and cultural life are both real and attitudinal.

“Inclusion matters: Access and empowerment of people of all abilities” is the theme of this year’s International Day of Persons with Disabilities. It is a theme that our union embraces. Unifor has long recognized that promoting an understanding of disability issues and mobilizing support for the dignity, rights and well-being of persons of all abilities is a worker’s issue, a union issue and a social justice issue. Our Union understands that integration of persons with disabilities in every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life will be beneficial to all people.

Through our educational initiatives and our work at bargaining tables and in workplaces, Unifor continues to help change misperceptions and counter stigma and stereotyping about persons with disabilities. We seek to build solidarity amongst all workers recognizing that we are all important parts of our human diversity.

Those initiatives are complimented by the work of Unifor’s Social Justice Fund. The SFJ has partnered with disability rights and development organizations like Handicap International and the Bangladesh Occupational Safety Health and Environment Foundation to offer rehabilitation and livelihood support to workers including those injured in the Rana Plaza collapse and those employed in the dangerous shipbreaking sector, respectively. We have also made donations to provide support in humanitarian crises around the world including those in Syria, Haiti and Nepal, recognizing that people with disabilities suffer particular vulnerability in times of natural and man-made disasters.

Above all, we recognize that there is still much work to do. The newly elected Canadian government campaigned on a platform that included support for a National Disabilities Act. We are hopeful that the Government will make good on its promise and make this a real priority and we expect that any national policy will promote the principle of empowerment. People with disabilities must be allowed to create real opportunities to enhance their own capacities and they must be supported in setting their own priorities. Real empowerment will require the government to invest in people - in jobs, health, nutrition, transportation, education, and increased social protections. It is only through this kind of commitment and investment that people with disabilities will finally enjoy access to society on an equal basis.

For more information on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities please visit:

UN Enable @ www.un.org/disabilities/