



OFFICE OF THE
PREMIER
CAYMAN ISLANDS GOVERNMENT

Message on International Day of Persons with Disabilities

By Premier Hon. G. Wayne Panton, MP, JP

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Parliament

Mr. Speaker, today is International Day of Persons with Disabilities and marks the United Nations observance to promote an understanding of, and appreciation for, disability issues. The goal of this day is to also raise awareness that will spark changes that support the dignity, rights and well-being of all persons with disabilities.

By United Nations estimates, today the world population is over 7 billion people and more than one billion, or about 15 per cent, live with some form of disability with 80 per cent of those living in developing countries.

Here in the Cayman Islands the observance of this day is important because it serves as a reminder that we need to continuously strive to increase the integration of persons with disabilities in every aspect of our political, social, economic and cultural lives.

Mr. Speaker, raising the level of awareness about disability issues is not just about one day of observance, but it is about thinking long term and understanding that disability inclusion is vital to achieving the global Sustainable Development Goals.

Whether it is through education, physical and mental healthcare, building design requirements, the services and programmes offered to adults with special needs at Sunrise Centre for the past 35 years or creating legislation and policy, the Government - along with many NGOs - has been actively involved in

improving the lives of persons with disabilities in the Cayman Islands for many years, and the PACT Government is committed to continue those efforts.

But Mr. Speaker there is much more work to be done as there are myriad ways in which we can improve our efforts to make the lives of persons with disabilities better. On this International Day of Persons with Disabilities, I ask us all to re-commit to building an inclusive and just future for everyone who has a disability so that no one is left behind.

The 2021 theme for this day is *Leadership and participation of persons with disabilities toward an inclusive, accessible and sustainable post-COVID-19 world*, which I think aptly reflects the climate of the ever-evolving pandemic.

The Cayman Islands National Council for Persons with Disabilities supports this theme and understands how difficult navigating through the new 'normal' of COVID-19 has been, in particular for persons with disabilities.

Importance of clear masks

Mr. Speaker, recently the Council decided that one of its areas of focus will be how to more effectively and inclusively communicate with persons with disabilities living in a pandemic environment.

Since March 2020, wearing a mask in public places and private settings has become the norm. While proper mask wearing is an effective public health measure to decrease the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19, it also serves as a communication barrier for those with hearing impairments and older persons whose hearing is diminishing because of age.

Mr. Speaker the chair of the National Council Magda Embury said, and I quote, *"The Council is advocating for the use and availability of clear masks in businesses, health services and educational institutions. We ask all businesses, institutions or organisations that interact with the public to consider*

designating at least one front-line person to wear a clear mask to assist those customers or clients who have difficulty communicating.

“Alternatively, having clear masks available for staff to use when the situation arises would be immensely helpful to those in the community who have hearing impairments and are struggling to stay safe, but still need people to be able to communicate effectively with them.”

She further explained that the Council can be contacted for recommendations on types of disposable and reusable clear masks that members have found to work well and encouraged businesses to sell clear masks in an effort to support persons with disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, she concluded by saying *“The power of receiving clear communications to persons with disabilities and a reassuring smile in many cases cannot be underestimated. The Council looks forward to seeing more persons wearing clear masks in the Cayman Islands in an effort to become more inclusive and sensitive to the needs of persons with disabilities during the pandemic.”*

Mr. Speaker I commend the Chair and Members of the Cayman Islands National Council for Persons with Disabilities and all the hard work that they do to advocate that our people and citizens with disabilities are treated fairly and with respect.

I am proud to say that it was during my tenure as Minister of Finance that Government enacted the Solomon Webster Disability Act in 2016 and the Cayman Islands Disability Policy 2014-2033. The Council serves an important role in relation to these two instruments given that they advise the public and private sector on disability issues, and they are the principal watchdog entity for monitoring the Government’s implementation efforts of the Policy. Mr. Speaker I encourage members of this Honourable House and the public to learn more about the Council and the work it does. You can follow

them on Facebook at www.facebook.com/disabilitycouncilcayman/ (all one word) or contact them through email at disabilitycouncil@gov.ky.

I will leave you with the words of Margaret Meade: *"If we are to achieve a richer culture, we must weave one in which each diverse human gift will find a fitting place."*

Mr. Speaker, I believe the Cayman Islands can be that fitting place.

Thank you.

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