



European Parliament of Disabled People Human Rights Symbolic Event

Disabled Europeans and Fundamental Rights

Speech by John Evans (7 minutes)

'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.'

These are the opening words of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights which declares that everyone is entitled to enjoy all the rights and freedoms laid down in it without distinction of any kind.

These rights belong to us as disabled people but are violated every day in Europe and across the world in horrific ways.

A man suffocated his 40 year-old brother who had Huntington's disease. He pleaded guilty to culpable homicide and the judge set him free. UK

In a residential institution in Bedum, Belgium, disabled people have been abused by carers and health workers, physically beaten and their money taken and used by staff.

In a residential home in the Netherlands, five elderly people with dementia were hit, spat at, kicked and called names by three nurses.

A 44 year-old disabled woman was confined, by her parents, to a cellar six feet deep from the age of 4. Social workers knew about this for 25 years. Spain.

Children in a home for intellectually disabled people were tethered to their beds in winter and left to freeze at night when the heating was turned off to save money. 15 children (a quarter of the residents) died. Bulgaria

A man from Venice, with mental health problems, was habitually locked in his home when his mother went out, leaving him alone. When fire broke out he discovered the front door locked and died of suffocation from smoke inhalation. Italy

A 55 year-old man with learning difficulties and impaired sight was attacked on his way to work by two skinheads and beaten and trampled to death. The youths told the police that “he was unworthy of life”. Germany

These are real and recent examples which have been reported to human rights organisations.

Over the last 12 months alone there have been 483 reports of abuse concerning 4,292 disabled people across the globe, and that 13% of the total number of victims have died as a direct result of human rights abuse;

These are just the reported cases, many more go unreported.

Many disabled people have no access to systems of justice.

Many countries do not recognise that certain treatment of disabled people is an abuse of their rights, sometimes because they do not consider disabled people as fully human or because the treatment is so common practice that it has never been recognised as a violation.

Many disabled people are too afraid to report abuse or are so used to the abuse that they do not identify it as abuse.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to get information from those countries with poor human rights records.

We may well ask what are our rights?

Disabled people have the right to life, liberty, security of the person.

We are entitled to equal protection against discrimination and we have the right to realise our economic, social and cultural rights, indispensable for our dignity and the free development of our personality.

We have the right to work and the right to favourable conditions of work.

We have a right to education and we have the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community.

We have a right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of ourselves and our families.

And above all, we have a right not to be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

The European Parliament in its most recent report on human rights has called on the European Commission to ensure that disability is explicitly recognised in EU work on human rights and monitored continuously.

There has to be effective legal frameworks, enforcement mechanisms and strong penalties if we are going to make a real difference and begin to stamp out such crimes against humanity.

Organisations of disabled people have a central role to play in monitoring the situation in respect of human rights; governments and the EU institutions must work with us to empower disabled people and to turn social attitudes around in order that ALL disabled people are respected and their dignity preserved.

Article 28 of the UN Declaration states that 'Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.'

At the close of the first day of this European Parliament of Disabled People I ask you to remember those disabled people that cannot be with us today and for whom we are here to represent – to fight for their rights as well as for our own - and to seek to ensure that the nice words appearing in the UN Declaration of Human Rights will be respected by all and experienced by all without exception.

Thank you