

**1<sup>st</sup> Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible of Social Cohesion  
Moscow, Russian Federation, 26-27 February 2009**

**Statement by Ms Viveca ARRHENIUS (Finland)  
Chairperson of the  
European Co-ordination Forum for the Council of Europe Disability Action Plan 2006-2015  
(CAHPAH)**

Honourable Chair, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to take the floor on behalf of the European Co-ordination Forum for the Council of Europe Disability Action Plan 2006-2015 (CAHPAH). My name is Viveca Arrhenius and I am the chairperson of CAHPAH.

I would like to share with you the following three messages:

Firstly: human rights, equal opportunities and solidarity are the cornerstones on which we build a society for all. Human and social rights and non-discrimination form the foundation on which social cohesion must be built. I would like to underline that we need a human rights approach to disability policies at all levels of policy making.

Secondly: a twin-track approach is needed to promote the development of policies for persons with disabilities. We need both mainstream policies and specific disability-oriented policies and programmes, which mutually reinforce each other. By adopting a double approach we can ensure that the different situations of people with disabilities, including situations of multiple discrimination, are properly addressed in social cohesion strategies.

Thirdly: I would like to emphasize the importance of implementing a participatory approach to all our activities. “Nothing about us without us” is the leading principle. Disabled persons and their organisations must be fully included in all processes at all levels. The European Co-ordination Forum for the Council of Europe Disability Action Plan provides a good platform for participation, policy making and sharing experiences at a pan-European level.

In 2006, the Council of Europe adopted the Disability Action Plan 2006-2015. The Plan aims at promoting the rights and full participation of people with disabilities in society and at improving the quality of life of people with disabilities in Europe. The Disability Action Plan provides a cross-sectorial and comprehensive framework and serves as a practical tool for member states when developing national disability strategies and implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The Disability Action Plan was launched at a pan-European Conference in St Petersburg in 2006, organised under the Russian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and supported by the Norwegian Chairmanship of the Nordic Council of Ministers. Furthermore, at that Conference, the St. Petersburg Declaration was adopted on the participation for all, innovation and effectiveness.

The Council of Europe Disability Action Plan 2006-2015 is unique because it acknowledges that there are people with disabilities who face specific barriers or experience multiple discrimination.

Women and girls with disabilities, people with disabilities in need of a high level of support, children and young people with disabilities, ageing people with disabilities and people with disabilities from minorities and migrant communities have a higher risk of exclusion and generally lower levels of participation in society than other disabled people. The current Spanish Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe organised a Conference on women with disabilities in León, Spain in February 2009. The aim of the conference was to highlight the right to vocational training and employment for women and girls with disabilities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We in the European Co-ordination Forum for the Council of Europe Disability Action Plan 2006-2015 (CAHPAH) are convinced that measures to ensure the integration and full participation of people with disabilities in society, based on human rights, equal opportunities and non-discrimination, help to ensure democracy and social cohesion in Europe. We are happy to take part in the dialogue on social rights and give voice to the concerns of persons with disabilities.

Thank you for your attention!