

Press Release

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Commissioner for Human Rights issues statement on the International Day of Disabled Persons

Strasbourg, 01.12.2006 - Institutions treating or accommodating people with disabilities need to be opened up to independent monitoring across the Council of Europe region, said Thomas Hammarberg, the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, on the occasion of the International Day of Disabled Persons (December 3).

"Many people who have been transferred to these institutions live entirely cut off from the world, in poor living conditions, on occasion ill-treated, with their freedom of movement restricted. Such facilities must therefore be opened to independent monitoring. In countries, where this has not yet been done, governments should establish national inspection systems, such as those required by the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention Against Torture," the Commissioner said.

"Equally important is the need to close down residential institutions and replace them with community-based alternatives to reduce the social exclusion of these individuals. Governments must ensure that people with disabilities have guaranteed access to quality health care, to education and that they are protected against abuses, ill-treatment and neglect. Life in such institutions often puts these rights at risk."

Recognising that such transformation is a complex and challenging undertaking for governments, the Commissioner recommends a gradual approach. "The first step should be to stop new admission to such institutions. Instead, parents should receive increased state support to enable them to raise their children who have disabilities. Childcare centres and schools should be open to all children and equipped to meet different needs."

"Where institutions still exist, basic human rights norms must be fully respected. Malpractices, such as keeping persons in bed all day, over-medication and the abuse of restraints must be stopped immediately. Any involuntary placement and treatment must be subject to judicial review. Procedural safeguards, such as oral hearing and legal representation, must be guaranteed and never become merely a paper exercise," the Commissioner said.

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