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Finland's EU Presidency

Statement on behalf of the European Union

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Ambassador
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New York, 13 December 2006

(check against delivery)

Madam President,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union.

The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia* and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania and Serbia, and the EFTA countries Iceland and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this declaration.

*) Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

Madam President,

The European Union would like to join other delegations in congratulating all of us, distinguished delegates and members of the civil society, for having concluded, in a relatively short period of time, the negotiations on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

We wish to express our deep appreciation to Ambassador McKay, as the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee. Without his dedication, commitment and determination, not to mention his competent guidance through this sometimes difficult process, we would not have had such an open, transparent and fully inclusive process and we would certainly not be here today with a Convention.

We also wish to thank the civil society that has been participating in large numbers in the process throughout the years in accordance with the principle "nothing about us without us". Without their valuable input and their intimate knowledge of the life with disabilities this Convention would not have as much value as it does now.

Equally, we wish to thank all the delegates who participated in the long hours of drafting and negotiating on all various issues regardless of the time and place and who, often through difficult compromises, were able to reach consensus on the text of the Convention.

On a more substantive matter, we wish to refer to the interpretative statement made by some States regarding paragraph 2 of Article 12 of the Convention. It is our understanding that the concept of 'legal capacity' has the same meaning in all language versions.

We hope that through the adoption and wide ratification of this Convention in the near future and through the awareness raising this process has been, the 650 million persons with disabilities in the world will have a better future with respect to their enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with others.

Through all these years we have been saying "nothing is agreed until everything is agreed".... Now that time has come and..."Everything has been agreed".

Thank you, Madam President.