

**Hon Anand Satyanand, PCNZM, QSO**  
**Governor-General of New Zealand**  
**FDR International Disability Award Acceptance**  
**United Nations**  
**6 May 2008**

May I begin by greeting everyone in the official languages of New Zealand, in English, Maori, Cook Island Maori, Niuean, Tokelauan and New Zealand Sign Language.

Greetings, Kia Ora, Kia Orana, Fakalofa Lahi Atu, Taloha Ni and as it is the evening and the sun has set (Sign)

May I specifically greet you: Your Excellency Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations and Mrs Ban; Mr Sha Zukang, Under Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs; Ambassador William vanden Heuvel, Founder and Chairman Emeritus of the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute; Hon Michael Deland and Dr Young Woo Kang, Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively of the World Committee on Disability; Mr David A Roosevelt; Mr Robert David Hall; Your Excellency Rosemary Banks, Ambassador for New Zealand to the United Nations; Mr Mike Gourley, President of the New Zealand Disabled Persons Assembly; Distinguished Guests otherwise; Ladies and Gentlemen.

Thank you for the invitation to represent New Zealand at the United Nations to accept the Franklin Delano Roosevelt International Disability Award for 2007.

As Governor-General of New Zealand, may I thank both the World Committee on Disability and the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute for bestowing this award on our country. I consider it a great honour to accept this award on behalf of New Zealand in such esteemed company.

This award reflects a sustained commitment to address the needs and wellbeing of New Zealanders who live with long-term impairment. Some have been born with disabilities and many others are disabled by injuries or illness later in life. New Zealand is committed to the principle that everyone is born equal in dignity and worth. Everyone is entitled - as a human right - to live a life to the fullest extent of his or her abilities.

The New Zealand Parliament formally affirmed the human rights of those with disabilities in a Human Rights Act in 1993. This new Act not only outlawed discrimination on the grounds of race, religion, ethnic and marital status—which had been prohibited by human rights legislation since the 1970s—but it also included for the first time, a commitment that New Zealanders who lived with disabilities should also be free from discrimination. Recognising that disabilities are as varied as the people that live with them, the Act provided a wide definition of disability and empowered our country's national Human Rights Commission to investigate complaints and to promote awareness of the rights of those who have disabilities.

In New Zealand most people with disabilities live independently in the community. Some require little or no support whereas others need assistance for sustained periods.

Therefore services for disabled people must be of a high standard. New Zealand appointed its first Health and Disability Commissioner in 1994, and the Commissioner, who was empowered by law to establish a statutory code of rights for health and disability service consumers, has assiduously promoted both through education and advocacy. The Commissioner is also responsible for investigating any complaints against service providers.

By the late 1990s, however, New Zealanders began to recognise that, although many agencies were involved in providing disability services, no-one was responsible for overseeing or co-ordinating them. To fill this gap, the Government created a new Minister for Disability Issues, whose role is to ensure that the needs of those with impairments are considered at the highest level in Government. With increasing demands on the Minister, an Office for Disability Issues was established in 2002 to work collaboratively with other government agencies and community groups to advance the vision of the New Zealand Disability Strategy, which had been mandated by the New Zealand Public Health and Disability Act 2000.

This Disability Strategy created at the millennium, set a new standard for participation by those with disabilities. For a very long time, decisions central to the lives of people with disabilities had been made for them, with little provision for any meaningful input by them. The Strategy was based on a partnership between the New Zealand Government and people with disabilities and their representatives.

In this context it gives me great pleasure to be joined today by the President of the New Zealand Disabled Persons Assembly Mike Gourley. This partnership has been fundamental to the journey on which the country has embarked which brings us all here today. There is an apposite Maori proverb: *Mau tena kiwai o te kete, maku tenei*, which literally translates to say *“You at the one handle, and I at the other handle of the basket.”* This proverb is used by the Maori to exemplify how, if we work together, great benefit can accrue to all.

The New Zealand Disability Strategy envisages a society that is continually working to enhance full participation and which highly values the lives of people with disabilities. In this partnership government agencies must ensure that they consider the rights of disabled people as an integral part of making decisions. The strategy is vital to the well being of the one-in-five New Zealanders who has a long-term impairment.

This commitment and partnership has been given practical expression in a number of ways. You might have noted that I began with greetings in New Zealand’s official languages. This was not something I did just for today - I included New Zealand Sign Language because Parliament passed an Act in 2006 making it an official language of New Zealand alongside Maori and English.

In 2006, New Zealand also completed the process of what some people call “deinstitutionalisation” so that people who have mental illnesses, intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities or both can live in the community.

As Governor-General, I am a Patron of many organisations that support people who have disabilities. Recently my wife Susan and I had the pleasure of celebrating the

New Zealand Down Syndrome National Achiever Awards. We had the opportunity to meet people who, despite many hurdles, have achieved in their communities. In honouring the young award winners, I reflected that there was a time when many in the room would have been housed in institutions – and to our society’s detriment, since today they contribute so much to New Zealand’s society.

With this background, it was therefore with considerable pride that in March last year the Minister for Disability Issues, the Hon Ruth Dyson, travelled to New York to sign the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. I am advised that New Zealand’s former Ambassador to the United Nations, His Excellency Don Mackay, played a significant role in chairing the committee that drafted the Convention, successfully steering delegates towards final agreement. I wish to pay tribute to the role he played and to the commitment of the New Zealand delegation.

New Zealand believes that empowering and supporting those with disabilities is not a social nicety, but is rather a deeper obligation that stems from its commitment to human rights. It is in this spirit that New Zealand will seek election to the United Nations Human Rights Council next year. With its long-standing commitment to civil, political and human rights, New Zealand believes it can make a significant contribution to the Council’s work.

In conclusion, may I register thanks again for the honour that is conveyed to New Zealand by this award, which reflects our ongoing commitment to human rights and to the rights of those living with disabilities. We have achieved much, although much remains to be done. I commend the far sighted aims of those who instituted the award that it might serve as an aspirational goal for all nations. I am sure that the award will encourage and sustain people with disabilities throughout the world.

It seems appropriate to close with some words of President Roosevelt. Despite being unable to walk unassisted after contracting polio, he went on to lead the United States through the Great Depression and the Second World War. Shortly before his death he wrote two sentences that can stand as a guide in the years ahead: *“The only limit to our realisation of tomorrow will be our doubts of today. Let us move forward with strong and active faith.”*

And on that note, I will close in New Zealand’s first language, Maori, by offering everyone greetings and wishing you good health and fortitude in your endeavours.

No reira, tena koutou, tena koutou, kia ora, kia kaha, tena koutou katoa.