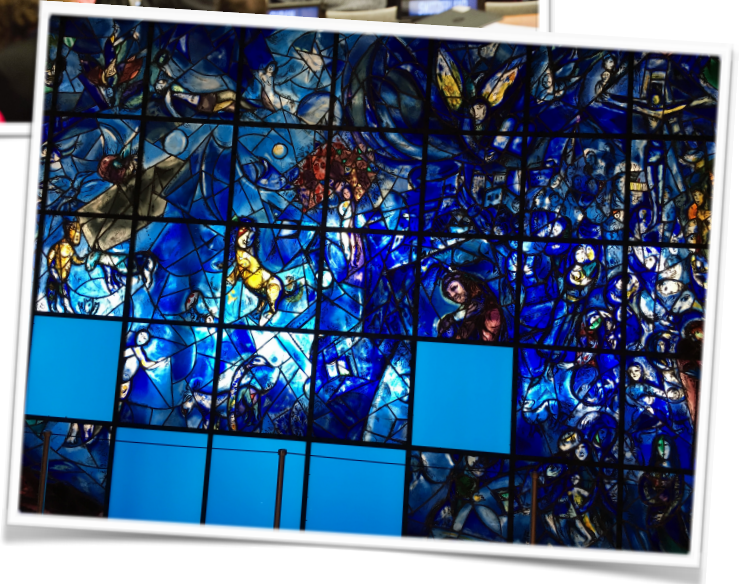




Rehabilitation International

# Annual Report 2015

Reaching toward a brighter future



Nearly 32 years ago, the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD) was not even on the agenda of the United Nations, the U.S. had not come close to creating an American with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Paralympics were an afterthought in world sporting events. But as Rehabilitation International (RI Global) gathered for its 15th World Congress in Lisbon, Portugal, President Harry S. Fang expressed hope for large-scale change in the coming decades. He had reason. RI Global had published its Charter for the 1980s in seven languages to great acclaim; the UN had used it as a blueprint for its World Program of Action for the Decade of Disabled Persons; and countless countries had looked to that framework.

Since then, RI Global has convened eight World Congresses and helped push for the ADA, which just celebrated 25 years, and the CRPD, which just finished 10 years on the UN books. RI Global has also spent the past few years developing a



“more effective structure for the harmonization of international cooperation in our field”. From 21-27 October, RI Global, its partners, affiliates and friends will once again meet in Edinburgh, Scotland for a promising Congress on topics ranging from Return to Work to independent living to international travel for PwDs. With more than 750 influential disability experts registered from 58 countries, this 23rd Rehabilitation International World Congress could be one of the most important events of 2016. In addition to the panelists and discussion, attendees will hear from such leaders as Penny Mordaunt, Minister of State for Disabled People, Health and Work, UK and Princess Anne, Princess Royal.

Lots has changed in RI Global’s third generation of existence, as reflected in the 1984 World Congress program, which featured greetings from the Governor of Hong Kong, the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and even Ronald Reagan, who noted that “the progress we have made is a tribute to the courage and determination of our disabled people.”

Jan Monsbakken

President, RI Global, 2012-2016

Rehabilitation International (RI Global) works to empower people with disabilities in order that they they enjoy their rights on an equal basis with others. It achieves this by campaigning for laws, policies and practices that respect and empower people with disabilities, and by working with partners in countries around the world to help people with disabilities gain access to education, rehabilitation, employment, health care, justice and inclusion in all aspects of society.

## RI GLOBAL RECENT ACHIEVEMENTS

Since its inception in 1922, RI Global has been at the forefront of disability rights, working to reverse the discriminatory attitudes and practices that previously excluded and devalued people with disabilities. In 1929, RI Global, then the International Society for Crippled Children, petitioned the League of Nations to establish an office to oversee the collection of disability-related statistics. From 1981 to 2006, as Rehabilitation International, the organization led the original campaign for the drafting and adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).



Now commonly known as RI Global, Rehabilitation International's most important recent feats have included leading the campaign for the universal adoption of the CRPD, as well as assisting the UN in achieving its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), now reconfigured as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or the 2030 Agenda, as they relate to Persons with Disabilities (PwDs).

Signed by an unprecedented number of countries (160 to date) in 2006, the CRPD consistently shifts the way persons with disabilities are viewed - from objects

who belong in wards or under-cloak, to active subjects with rights, free will and abilities, based on free and informed consent. Along the path to full CRPD ratification, RI Global World Congresses, assemblies, conferences, training sessions, publications and UN advocacy have brought together thousands of disability allies and activists to reframe disability issues and rethink the delivery of disability services and using a rights perspective. Regarding the development goals of the UN, RI Global has provided forums for experts in the disability field to meet, discuss and exchange experiences with an end-view: making a tangible difference in the lives of people with disabilities. To that end, RI Global has produced the Sendai Statement on Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DiDRR) to meet SDG 13 on Climate Action; established partnerships with women's networks to assist disabled women under SDG 10 on Reducing Inequalities; and is working on a set of Return to Work guidelines for PwDs for SDG 8 on Good Jobs and Economic Growth.

## RI GLOBAL STRUCTURE

RI Global comprises a worldwide network of grassroots organizations, service providers, researchers, academics, professionals and government agencies with members in more than 100 countries. A democratic Non-governmental organization (NGO) governed by an Executive Committee, RI Global provides both an open forum for the exchange of experience, information and research, as well as a platform from which people advocate for policies and enact programs that protect the human rights of people with disabilities.

RI Global is the only international disability NGO that is both cross-disability and cross-disciplinary. This approach allows RI Global to address disability as a whole, taking into account the range of disabilities, from physical to mental to psycho-social. Headquartered in New York City, RI Global holds consultative status with the United Nations and its agencies, and has official relations with the World Health Organization. Because success depends on the unity and strength of the disability community as a whole, RI Global seeks to work collaboratively in all of its activities, with a small staff based in New York that coordinates members and partners in the execution of RI Global's programs.



## RI GLOBAL ORGANIZATION

The RI Global Secretariat is led in New York by **Secretary-General Venus Ilagan**, who has spent more than 30 years as a leader in the disabilities field. A native of the Philippines, Ms. Ilagan served as the first woman chairperson of Disabled Peoples' International, participated in the execution of the CRPD, continues to be involved in the work of several disabled people's networks in the Philippines.



The Secretariat is guided by a 25-member Executive Committee that includes disability leaders from 17 countries, chaired by **RI Global President Jan Monsbakken**. Mr. Monsbakken has served on a range of organisations, including the European Disability Forum, the International Federation of Psoriasis Associations and as Deputy Vice-President of RI Global. He has also been actively involved in the Norwegian Women's Public Health Association.

**Zhang Haidi, the incoming President of RI Global**, is regarded as China's Helen Keller for her outspokenness on disability rights. She is the chairperson of the China Disabled Persons Federation and vice chairperson of the Shandong Writers' Association. Born in Jinan, Shandong Province, Ms. Zhang became a paraplegic at age five due to complications from polio. Ms. Zhang is best known for authoring her life story Beautiful English and the novel, A Dream in Wheelchair.



# Chapter One: RI GLOBAL'S WORK

## UNITED NATIONS 2015



With offices less than three city blocks from the entrance of the United Nations, Rehabilitation International has become an important presence there, especially with the fight for complete ratification of the CRPD in the past 10 years. The following outlines

some of the more visible and important events attended by RI Global members during 2015.

### 2014 International Day of Persons with Disabilities

The 2014 International Day of persons with Disabilities took place on 3 December with Secretary-General Venus Ilagan included as one of two Civil Society Organization representatives invited to speak at the Opening Session at United Nations Headquarters. The theme for the International Day, "Sustainable Development: The Promise of Technology", aimed to solicit conversation on ways in which organizations could harness the power of technology to promote inclusion and accessibility among PwDs in shaping the SDGs for all.

On 2 December Ms. Ilagan participated in a panel discussion ***Creating Enabling Working Environments*** hosted by UN-DESA. The panel examined the UN "Policy on persons with disabilities in the United Nations workplace", which has guided the UN system in creating reasonable accommodations - physical, communications, technical and other - allowing people with disabilities to work at the UN and in the field. Ms. Ilagan also spoke at a side event held at the United Nations Church Center entitled ***The Intersection of Ageing and Disability***.

“Many people with disabilities use technology to enhance learning, work and independence for them to reach their full potential,” Ms. Ilagan explained. “Through increased independence and productivity, PwDs can be physically, socially, academically, recreationally and vocationally integrated into the community.”

### 53rd Session of the Commission for Social Development (CSocD53)



Just after the new year, Ms. Ilagan attended the 2015 Civil Society Forum preceding the opening of the 53rd Session of the UN Commission for Social Development from 4-13 February. ***Rethinking and Strengthening Social Development in the Contemporary World*** aimed at designing a “Life of Dignity for All”. Talks focused on economic outcomes that exacerbated the inequalities and deprivations faced by PwDs and concluded that governments, civil society and social development stakeholders must ensure that the development agenda took into account those inequalities. RI Global testified that the Post-2015 Agenda would continue to systematically exclude and disempower the most vulnerable populations without the voice of the disabled. “Only when the international community prioritizes the participation, empowerment, and full involvement of marginalized people would development be sustainable,” Ms. Ilagan told the Forum.

### 59th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW59)

On 12 March, as part of the 59th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW59), RI Global participated in an event entitled ***Women with Disabilities: 20 Years After Beijing***. The informal discussion took stock of existing networks of women with disabilities with a view to strengthening their voice and perspectives in policy-dialogues at the global, regional and national levels. The event marked the third consecutive year RI Global contributed programming to the CSW, ensuring that



the rights of women with disabilities would remain a continuing focus of the organization in the years ahead. It featured Secretary-General Ilagan, former RI Global President Anne Hawker of New Zealand and RI Global Africa Vice President Ekaete Umoh of Nigeria, who, among other topic discussions, reviewed implementation of the Beijing Platform, as well as mainstreaming perspectives of women and girls with disabilities in development.

### UN DSPD-DESA

UN's Division for Social Policy and Development invited RI Global to participate in an Expert Group Meeting under the theme ***Disability and development: operationalizing the post-2015 development agenda for persons with disabilities*** from 11-13 May in Beirut, Lebanon. In view of the emerging post-2015 development framework, the Expert Group Meeting was convened by the UN DESA in collaboration with the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA), to strengthen disability-inclusive development implementation at global, regional and national levels.

The Meeting brought together experts from around the world to take stock of recent progress in mainstreaming disability; to explore options for and strategies to operationalize the post-2015 development agenda; and to address specific opportunities and challenges in the Arab Region for advancing the inclusion and participation of PwDs in development.

### UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), 8th Conference of States Parties (CoSP8)

RI Global participated actively in the 2015 Annual Conference of States Parties (CoSP8) on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) held 9-11 June 2015 at the UN Secretariat in New York. President Jan Monsbakken joined Secretary-General Venus Ilagan, along with Treasurer Susan Parker, Work & Employment Commission Chair Madan Kundu, Deputy Vice President for North



America Mathieu Simard and RI Foundation Member Khaled Al-Mohter in representing RI Global.

During the opening plenary of CoSP8, Mr. Monsbakken informed Member-States about the global work of Rehabilitation International and later that evening attended a welcome reception hosted by Ambassador Oh Joon of the Mission of the Republic of Korea and President of the Economic and Social Commission (ECOSOC) for the 2015-16. Ms. Ilagan spoke at a panel on global Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) in a side event organized by RI Global member, Korean Society for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities (KSRPD), in collaboration with the Mission of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations. RI Global also provided commentary at a panel ***Bridging the Gap***, organized by the Permanent Mission of the State of Qatar and the Shafallah Center for Children with Special Needs, and co-organized a one-day Civil Society Forum with the International Disability Alliance and Disabled Peoples International.

Also, during the CoSP8, Monsbakken and Ilagan met with UNICEF's Adviser on Children with Disabilities, Roseangela Berman-Bieler, to receive a debriefing on UNICEF's ongoing initiatives for children with disabilities. Ms. Bieler said her team had been closely working with country offices to ensure a collaborative effort in the inclusion of disabled children in all of UNICEF's programs and activities. UNICEF had also implemented an internal policy that mandated all structures financed by the organization included access features for the disabled.

### 2015 ECOSOC High-Level Political Forum (HLPF)

From 18-19 June, RI Global took part in a workshop on ***Governance, Transparency and Accountability: Major Groups and Other Stakeholders (MGoS) Collaboration*** toward the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) at UN headquarters in New York. The workshop discussed ways in which the mechanisms of MGoS could adapt to best function within the review architecture put in place to carry out the post-2015 sustainable development agenda at the national, regional and global levels, including the HLPF.

The meeting convened with remarks by Thomas Gass, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs of UN DESA, who cited the importance of not leaving anyone behind in both the MDGs review process and in the implementation of the SDGs. RI Global Secretary-General, Venus Ilagan asked Mr. Gass to suggest a possible mechanism that would include stakeholders traditionally excluded from public discourse on important issues, especially people with disabilities. The outcome of the two-day workshop was a series of proposals for the monitoring, follow-up and review of the Post-2015 Development Agenda at all UN levels.

### **Friends of the CRPD**

In July, RI Global was one of only two disability organizations invited to the Friends of CRPD Working Breakfast hosted by ECOSOC President and CoSP Bureau Chair Ambassador Oh Joon and held at the Mission of the Republic of Korea. The meeting facilitated the discussion of measures to make the working environment of the United Nations more accessible and inclusive of persons with disabilities. Among other priorities, Ambassador Oh, in consultation with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, has sought the support of friendly states to develop a draft resolution compelling the General Assembly to request a comprehensive report of the Secretary-General on the ways in which the UN has actualized a disability-inclusive working environment in its facilities at the Secretariat and around the world.

RI Global made several recommendations, which included advising that UN employees with disabilities should form a committee that regularly monitored progress of the renovations to ensure that all new UN facilities were accessibility-compliant and met CRPD. RI Global also suggested that the UN Secretariat hold accessibility walk-through activities in several phases during the renovation process rather than retrofit facilities after the UN completed construction.

### **2015 Sustainable Development Goals**

From September 25-27, Member States met at the United Nations in New York to adopt the post -2015 Development Agenda, otherwise known as the Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs). The event marked a historic turning point in the lives of persons with disabilities worldwide.

In 2000, the UN had established the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, the MDGs did not include the needs of people with disabilities, although 80 percent of people with disabilities around the world live in poverty. The UN's new 15-



year plan for global development contained several related to disabilities. These are: **Goal 4.** Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all; **Goal 10.** Reduce inequality within and among countries; **Goal 8.** Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all; and **Goal 11.** Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

On 24 November 2015 a draft resolution entitled ***Toward the full realization of an inclusive and accessible United Nations for persons with disabilities***, was adopted in the Third Committee of the General Assembly. The resolution requested the establishment of a unified and comprehensive policy framework ensuring that the UN's working environment became fully inclusive and accessible. RI Global committed to keeping governments, the UN, and other powerful bodies accountable to people with disabilities.

### UN Habitat III

RI Secretary General Venus Ilagan spoke at the UNDESA-DSPD Forum on ***Disability Inclusion and Accessible Urban Development***, held at the United Nations Office in Nairobi, Kenya from 28-30 October. The forum reviewed aimed to put



**ADD YOUR VOICE TO  
THE URBAN DIALOGUES**

together a set of recommendations that advanced disability inclusion in the global discourse on urban development and the New Urban Agenda (UN-Habitat III). For the world's one billion persons living with disabilities, urban areas - if continually ill-planned and built - present significant challenges, including lack of accessible infrastructure, facilities and basic public services. RI Global, which has followed urban disabled development since its

onset, mandated that constructing cities and towns to accessible standards and making them inclusive of all people, especially those with disabilities, was essential for sustainable urban development.

### **2015 International Day of Persons with Disabilities**

On 3 December, the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD), RI Global organized and participated in various events under the theme Inclusion matters: access and empowerment for people of all abilities. The day also took on three sub-themes: making cities inclusive and accessible for all; improving disability data and statistics; and including persons with "invisible" disabilities in society and development. RI Global Secretary Venus Ilagan discussed accessible travel and universal design at a panel about making urban areas inclusive and accessible. "Access does not only benefit persons with disabilities or those with special needs, it benefits us all," she said, before ending this year's IDPD at a reception held by the Permanent Missions of Mexico, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Turkey and Australia, featuring Indonesia and Korean musicians with disabilities.



As a coda to 2015, on 15 and 16 December, RI Global attended the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) annual review meeting at United Nations Headquarters in New York to make the point that information technology was key to sustainable development, especially for disabled persons.



## Chapter Three: RI GLOBAL COMMISSIONS



Within the structure of RI Global there exist seven Commissions of specialists and experts on issues in disability, which assist in developing and expanding programming and activities in accordance with RI Global's strategic goals. These Commissions meet throughout the year to examine the most pressing topics for people with disabilities around the world and devise an agenda of action. The year 2015 proved engrossing and engaging for the Commissions, as the Post-2015 agenda put new goals on the table and previous objectives, such as Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DiDRR) and Return to Work (RtW) inched forward. The following provides a look at the work of the Commissions in 2015.

**RI Global's Commission on Work and Employment** promotes the rights of people with disabilities to participate in labour, trade unions and other integrated settings, thereby empowering them to be productive members of society. The Commission carries out its mission by, among other objectives, actively:

- Implementing Article 27 of United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities in collaboration with public and private entities, NGOs and trade unions.
- Developing an online Resource Network of Experts to advise on issues of disability employment.

- Offering technical assistance to member nations in collaborative research projects designed to identify evidence-based practices capable of enhancing employment outcomes and quality of life for people with disabilities.

**WEC HIGHLIGHT – *Return to Work (RtW) put into action:*** On 20 September 2015, the RI Global Work and Employment Commission (WEC) met in Hong Kong to define “standard skills for RtW professionals”. RtW is a concept by which varying approaches help employees work while still recuperating, protecting their earning power and boosting an organization's output, as well as an important role in the recovery process.



Lots of terms and educational programs for “disability managers” exist all over the world, the WEC determined, but a benchmark had still not been established. RI designated Madan Kundu, the head of Southern University’s Department of Rehabilitation and Disability Studies, and Friedrich Mehrhoff, the head of rehabilitation strategies in the German Federation of Insurers, to define the basic RI Global WEC framework in RtW competencies for universities. It advises that disability counseling students learn not only the medical, functional and environmental aspects of a disability, but also the group dynamics present in rehabilitation. Students must identify strategies to reduce attitudinal barriers affecting people with disabilities, as well as to demonstrate an understanding of stereotypical views toward individuals with a disability and the negative effects of these views on rehabilitation outcomes. Prospective RtW counselors should also have a minimum of 100 hours of supervised rehabilitation counseling with at least 40 hours of direct service to people with disabilities. The Executive Committee will decide on the standards by the end of 2016.

**RI Global’s Commission on Education** advises on the creation and promotion of educational opportunities for children and youth with disabilities. The Commission also facilitates the provision of integrated services and inclusive quality education for the participation of disabled people. The work broadly comprises:

**EDUCATION HIGHLIGHT – *RI Global reports on education for the disabled:*** In 2015, Hashem Taqi, Chair of RI Global’s Education Commission, wrote an in-depth report *Issues facing young people with disabilities after compulsory education on the transition from school to work for young PwDs.* The report, submitted to the RI Global board, concluded that children attending special schools are less likely to access available services in the mainstream system (e.g. career planning and transitions support) since special schools are generally protected environments that do not encourage the development of necessary life skills, personal skills and social skills needed to be successful in normal work settings. Generally, in countries where most children with disabilities go to regular schools, transition outcomes are better. Taqi concluded inclusive education is a priority - not only to fulfill the requirements of the CRPD, but also for economic reasons.



- Advocating the provision of facilities and services for inclusive education in different regions by Regional Chairpersons of Education Commission.
- Initiating and following up on distance and e-learning facilities for youth with disabilities.

**EDUCATION HIGHLIGHT – *School to Work (StW) initiative:*** The Work and Employment and Education Commissions, began drafting curricula for rehabilitation studies departments to use in teaching therapists the “transition from school to work” - or school-to-work (StW) strategies - for PwDs. Compared to their nondisabled peers, students with disabilities are more likely to experience unemployment or underemployment, lower pay, and job dissatisfaction, and must therefore have help in identifying their strengths for success in the workplace. The Commission found a need for a comprehensive, trans-disciplinary vocational assessment that facilitates planning for students make a successful adjustment to work, postsecondary education and community living. Without a comprehensive assessment of a student’s skills, it is difficult to lay out a student’s transition plan. The ultimate plan for release at the end of 2017 will become a standard of StW practices for dissemination across Europe.

**RI Global's International Commission on Technology and Accessibility (ICTA)** broadly focuses on the promotion of accessibly built and virtual environments, including assistive technology, as well as maintains a forum facilitating the exchange of ideas and good practices, notably in the areas of housing, public transportation, communications, technical aids and universal design.

ICTA also works to sensitize decision makers in the public and private sectors, as well as community leaders, regarding the obstacles faced by persons with disabilities and offer possible solutions through technologies. The members of the various ICTA sub-commissions constitute a voluntary network of experts in the area of technology and accessibility, notably specialists in the integration and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, developers of technological aids, human resources specialists, experts in the design of accessible environments, representatives of civil society and experts from government and the academy.

**ICTA HIGHLIGHT – RI Global Partners with Otto Bock:** The OttoBock HealthCare Group, which produces mobility products for the disabled, in Fall of 2015 signed a memorandum of understanding with RI Global to partner on projects that aimed at improving availability of Assistive Health Technology (AHT) for PwDs. Ottobock and RI Global will jointly promote the importance and relevance of access to AHT for mobility at international conferences and congresses, as well as support the WHO-GATE initiative on AHT.

Each year, a Steering Committee will review the progress of the partnership and advise on ways to keep advancing RTW agenda, as a key part of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Further adaption of products have begun in the Asia Pacific region, with a report due at the end of the year.



**RI Global's Commission on Health and Function** promotes the well-being of persons with disabilities, supports the prevention of disability and strengthens gender sensitive rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities. The Commission, through its regular work and meetings around the world, has a mission to:



- Provide technical support in health/rehab/assistive technology programmes for persons with disabilities.
- Enable training programmes for medical and paramedical professionals for the welfare of persons with disabilities.
- Encourage Community-based Rehabilitation principles through a primary health care approach.

**H&F HIGHLIGHT – *Global Cooperation on Assistive Technology*:** On 29 October 2015, Premier Li Keqiang of China and Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany attended and addressed the opening ceremony of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) High-Level Meeting on Disability and Global Conference on Assistive Devices and Technology at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China.



The meeting was organized by RI Global, the World Health Organization (WHO) and China Disabled Persons' Federation. Li stressed that after decades of unremitting efforts, China still needed to further improve the public service system for the disabled and increase the supply of public products and public services. Merkel expressed that inclusiveness was the core concept behind the framework the ASEM had opened up new areas for Germany-China cooperation.

**Rehabilitation International's Commission on Leisure, Recreation & Physical Activities (LRPA)** promotes the right for interactive lifestyle for all people with disabilities in educational, physical, social and cultural activities. The LRPA Commission facilitates participation in various projects throughout the year, especially around the bidding for three world events: Abilympics, Senior Games and the International Lions Club's Special Olympics. Generally, the Commission promote implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities with a special emphasis on Article 30 by:

- Developing and disseminating best practice in the LRPA for persons living with disabilities and elderly people.
- Enhancing cooperative relationships with international agencies such as UN, Human Rights, International Disability Alliance (IDA), the International Paralympic Committee (IPC), UNESCO, WHO, and the International Lions Clubs.

**LRPA COMMISSION HIGHLIGHT – RI Global sails *The Impossible Dream for equality*:** On 15 August 2015, RI Global Treasurer Susan Parker set sail on *The Impossible Dream*, the only wheelchair accessible catamaran in the world, alongside persons with disabilities and their families. *The Impossible Dream* is a universally accessible 60' sailing catamaran. She was created by Mike Browne, a paraplegic who had a dream of a vessel that could sail the oceans while fully operational by a person in a wheelchair. She was built by Multi-Marine with the help of Deborah Mellen, an accomplished businesswoman, paraplegic, and sailing volunteer at Shake A Leg Miami. *Impossible Dream* is based at Shake A Leg Miami, one of the most accessible community boating centers in the world.



**RI Global's Commission on Policy and Service** identifies new policies and programs in each of the world's geographic regions and analyses the ways in which these developments align with the implementation of the UN CRPD. Once per year, the Commission also organizes outreach at the National Rehabilitation Conference in Helsinki, one of the most important training and networking events for rehabilitation practitioners. In 2014 the conference focused on rehabilitation among children and young adults and their transition to work, with papers presented on challenges for disabled young people; in 2015, plenary sessions concentrated on return to work practices in various European countries.

**COMMISSION HIGHLIGHT – RI Global launches Sendai Framework:** A new framework on Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DiDRR) was officially adopted on 18 March 2015 at the Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai, Japan, after RI Global ensured the inclusion of disability in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030. Resolution 69/283, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 – adopted by the UN General Assembly on 3 June 2015 – included language specifically calling for a broader and a more people-centred preventive approach to disaster risk.



“While recognizing their leading, regulatory and coordination role, Governments should engage with relevant stakeholders, including women, children and youth, persons with disabilities... in the design and implementation of policies, plans and standards,” the new language stated.

**RI Global’s Social Commission** advances knowledge- and evidence-based practice to support the psychosocial functioning of people with disabilities in order to achieve maximum richness in their participation in society as citizens. It also engages in the capacity building of groups and communities to promote and implement the CRPD, as well as disability inclusiveness throughout all sectors of society.

**COMMISSION HIGHLIGHT – RI Global joins Disability Pride march:** On 12 July 2015, the first-ever Disability Pride NYC Parade, a commemoration of the 25th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), took place in New York City. The day attracted more than 3,000 participants and marked one of the largest gatherings celebrating and advocating for disability rights in the United States. RI Secretary-General, Venus Ilagan, joined Victor Calise, the Commissioner of the Mayor’s Office of People with Disabilities, in helping New York “remember that people with disabilities belong to society, deserve equal rights and should honor themselves,” she said. Ambassador to the United Nations from Korea, Oh Joon, the President of the Conference of States Parties to the CRPD, served as a Grand Marshal.



## Chapter Four: RI GLOBAL REGIONS

As Rehabilitation International moved its permanent office from downtown Manhattan to a new space at 866 United Nations Plaza – next door to the UN Secretariat – so did the organization develop closer ties with the international body and many Member States around the world to fight for a global standard of inclusion. Just over a month later, the RI Global Executive Committee held its annual meeting in Hong Kong from 19-20 September 2015, which was hosted by the Hong Kong Joint Council on Disability. During the conference, newly elected RI Global President, Haidi Zhang, announced a donation of 500,000 RMBi (approximately USD\$78,000) from the Chinese Disabled Persons' Federation (CDPF) to support the implementation of RI Global's new Membership Strategy for Africa.

Roy O'Shaughnessy, CEO of Shaw Trust, a UK organization that supports disabled people in finding employment and other services, announced its hosting of RI Global's 23rd World Congress for 21 October 2016. Under the theme, "Create a More Inclusive World," the World Congress will cap off two efficacious years at RI Global, the organization plans to keep bringing all the parties under its umbrella closer, even as they work on their own initiatives. The following is a summary of these advances by region.



### RI GLOBAL REGIONS: EUROPE

***Rehabilitating social insurance in Europe:*** Europe has a long tradition (nearly 100 years) of providing rehabilitation as part of social security. In the last years the member-countries of the European Union (EU) have been searching for answers regarding social services based on the UN CRPD, especially as some European countries have reduced their high standard in order to cut state costs, thus forcing stakeholders to create their own rehabilitative measures. Article 26 CRPD (Rehabilitation) and Art. 27 (Employment) strengthen legal-based positions of the individual disabled person against the state.

But as European leaders have found, rehabilitation opens a return on investments. Not only have social insurance carriers and employers decided to invest in rehabilitation to increase employability and reduce early retirement, but politicians



have also been confronted with the pressure of financing community-based rehabilitation in order guarantee equal standards for all persons under international treaties, including the CRPD.

A recent report authored by the National Secretaries of RI Global Europe, Dr. Joachim Breuer (Germany), Francois Perl (Belgium), and Friedrich Mehrhoff (Germany), Return to work of people suffering from chronic diseases in the EU was introduced in Brussels in February 2016. Since then, RI Global members in Europe have discussed finding partners within the EU for promoting rehabilitation in every EU country and Francois Perl has begun collaboration with the European Social Insurance Partners (ESIP)

### ***RI Global attends ISPRM World Congress in***

***Berlin:*** The 9th World Congress of the International Society of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine (ISPRM) took place from on 19-23 June 2015 in Berlin. Some 3,000 participants attended, including Rehabilitation International, and took part in such workshops as Implementation of the *WHO Disability*

*Action Plan 2014-2021: Better Health for All People with Disabilities; Rehabilitation as a Comprehensive Health Strategy; and Disability Culture.* RI Global Work and Employment Commission Vice Chair Friedrich Mehrhoff, RI Global Foundation board member Joachim Breuer, and RI Global President Jan Monsbakken attended the ISPRM Congress and discussed German-Chinese cooperation regarding disability and Return-to-Work strategies.



### **RI GLOBAL REGIONS: MENA**

#### ***RI Global's Executive Committee meets in Kuwait:***

In early March, Hashem Taqi, Chair of RI's Education Commission welcomed the RI Global Executive Committee members to Kuwait for a two-day meeting on the direction of the organization. At the meeting, the EC discussed new membership strategies for Africa and the Americas, while welcoming the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of



Moldova as a new member. They also discussed new plans for partnerships in 2015, especially regarding the International Society of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine (ISPRM), WHO's Disability and Rehabilitation team and GAATES on accessibility technology.

RI Global President Jan Monsbakken handed Certificates of Appreciation to Mr. Taqi and the Kuwait Handicapped Society for their support, including a pre-meeting visit to the rehabilitation center and a meeting with Munira Al-Mutawa, a very important longtime member and supporter of RI.

***RI Global increases development in the Middle East:*** From 11-12 October 2015, RI Global's Secretary-General Venus Ilagan traveled to Dubai to take part in the Dubai Inclusive Development Forum, a strategic event organized by The Executive Council of Dubai under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Mansoor bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Chairman of the Higher Committee for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The forum was part of the *My Community... A City For Everyone* initiative, launched in November 2013, which is aimed at integrating governmental and non-governmental efforts to make Dubai a disability-friendly city by 2020. The interactive platform allowed participants and government task forces to benefit from international experiences in inclusive development policies and their application in various sectors. It featured more than 30 global and local speakers, including Ms. Ilagan, and more 500 attendees. The knowledge gained from the event will serve to

inform the development of programs and policies that serve health, education, employment, social protection and urban development in Dubai and beyond.



### RI GLOBAL REGIONS: SOUTH AMERICA

**RI Global extends its South American network:** On 25 June 2015, RI Colombia organized a meeting with various stakeholders in Bogota to explore possibilities of expanding their current network in order to play

a more active role in the implementation of the UN CRPD, which Colombia ratified in 2011. At the meeting, organized by Professor Karin Del Rocio Garzon of Del Rosario University, RI Global Secretary-General Venus Ilagan made a presentation on the various initiatives of RI Global, including the work it has carried out regarding the implementation of the CRPD and the potential ways the organization could collaborate with the multi-stakeholder groups in Colombia.



The International Secretariat came away with an agreement with RI Global Colombia - based at the Del Rosario University - to explore specific projects aimed at their common goals, as well as the branch's active participation in various international conferences and events to share experiences that could benefit other countries of similar economic and demographic makeup. RI Global Colombia also agreed to help surrounding countries in South America in the effective implementation of the CRPD.



### RI GLOBAL REGIONS: NORTH AMERICA

**The Universal Symbol of Accessibility faces challenge:** As the politics of disability have grown more nuanced, a burgeoning audience has lobbied for an updated version of the

International Symbol of Accessibility – the symbol created by Rehabilitation International in the 1960s, which had gained the imprimatur of the United Nations designating its universality. The lead organization in the discussions, the Accessible Icon Project, has created a new logo with a forward-leaning head and motioning arms indicating the figure as the “driver” or decision maker about his or her mobility. New York adopted the new symbol in 2014 and Connecticut has considered the changes, as have several Western states. Although debate regarding the merits of the new vs. old symbol has entered discussion among various activist organizations, the International Organization for Standardization has argued against the new design, citing universal recognition of the original one.



Proponents of the new symbol assert they want the symbol to represent a new acceptance toward PwDs – one that does not underestimate them any longer. They believe the redesigned icon could prompt more funding and better social programs for PwDs. It’s been suggested that a disability activist organization take the lead in bringing all parties to the table.

## RI GLOBAL REGIONS: ASIA PACIFIC

**RI Global visits North Korea:** When in 2005, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) announced that the country no longer needed international aid, most humanitarian operators left the country. But a few stayed, including Handicap International, and started working with the Korean Federation for the Protection of the Disabled (KFPD) supporting the Hamhung Orthopedic Factory in sensory disability.

In 2013, a vice premier of the DPRK invited RI Global President Jan Monsbakken to visit the country. In April, a RI GLOBAL contingent traveled to the country to tour rehab centers, meet representatives of NGOs, including Handicap International and UNICEF, and listen to organizations expressing an interest in joining



RI Global. Handicap International has supported the provincial development of the KFPD its numerous training courses and seminars to improve the understanding of disability and promote awareness-raising actions. With the recent amendment of the Law on Protection of Disabled People, RI Global is aiming to help nascent DPRK organizations build project management capacities and develop an international network of funding.



***RI Global holds annual meeting in Hong Kong; honors M.B. Lee:*** For his work in setting up the foundation of RI Global Asia, as well as securing RI Global's Headquarters in New York, RI Global presented a 2015 Presidential Award to M.B. Lee at its annual General Assembly in Hong Kong on 21 September. Lee, a paraplegic, served the Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation (HKSR) which provides diversified and multi-facet services to people with disabilities, chronic illnesses and/or problems of aging. In the 1990s, he and then-RI Global President, the late Dr. Harry Fang, bought the office condominium that housed RI Global for the next 25 years and enabled the organization to maintain active involvement and engagement with the United Nations and other important actors in the field of rehabilitation and disability.

Capped off by the awards, the Executive Committee of RI Global accomplished many initiatives at the meeting, hosted by the Hong Kong Joint Council on Disability, including the announcement by RI President-Elect, Haidi Zhang, of a donation of 500,000 RMBi (approximately USD\$78,000) from the Chinese Disabled Persons' Federation (CDPF) to support the implementation of RI' Global's Membership Strategy for Africa. Roy O'Shaughnessy, CEO of Shaw Trust, RI Global's member organization in the UK, announced the theme of the World Congress, "Create a More Inclusive World," as well as the venue: the Edinburgh International Convention Center (EICC), which can accommodate up to 1,100 participants. He also expanded on ongoing negotiation with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) about coverage of the RI Congress.





## RI GLOBAL REGIONS: SOUTHEAST ASIA

**RI Global participates in ASEAN study:** Early in 2015, the Institute on Disability and Public Policy (IDPP), a collaborative think tank on disability policy for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region of the United Nations asked RI Global Secretary-General Venus Ilagan to participate in a study to help researchers understand the factors that enhance or limit the participation of persons with disabilities in the United Nations system and broader global governance.



The resulting report, *Participation of Persons with Disabilities in the UN System and Broader Global Governance Processes*, was presented on 9 June 2015 at the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CoSP8). The study's preliminary findings concluded that practices, such as the conducting of meetings in multimedia formats for persons with disabilities, as well as making side events universally accessible, further advanced the effective participation of PwDs in the UN system. The Nippon Foundation had ensured that the Third World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai, Japan earlier in 2015 had been made completely accessible for persons with disabilities. As a result, more than 200 persons with disabilities contributed to the discussions on implementation of inclusive disaster risk reduction resulting in a more robust Sendai Framework.