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Remarks by Lex Frieden
Aachen, Germany
November 11, 2002

Honored patrons, colleagues and friends: It is my great honor and a sincere pleasure to address you here today.

Thank-you to the sponsoring organizations and thank-you to all of the people who have worked so hard to make this a successful conference. I appreciate your hospitality and I look forward to the stimulating program which you have planned for us.

In my remarks this morning, I will share with you some thoughts about Rehabilitation International, the organization which I am representing here today. I will also briefly discuss three imperatives -- important goals to which I believe we should all be committed.

I think many of you have heard about Rehabilitation International. Because of its' age -- it was founded in 1921 -- you may think of it as an old and outdated organization. Because of its' history as a paternalistic organization -- in 1939 it was called The International Society for the Welfare of the Cripples -- you may believe it is irrelevant in the context of the modern paradigms of rehabilitation, disability, and consumer-direction.

But I implore you not to jump to such conclusions... Today, RI is an exceptional organization in many positive respects. Today, RI is the only international organization focusing on disability issues which welcomes into its membership any organization which is committed to its' goals and purposes, regardless of whether that organization is composed mostly of people with disabilities or not, regardless of whether it is governmental or nongovernmental, and regardless of whether it is made up mostly of professionals or non-professionals. Further, today, RI is a vibrant, dynamic organization lead by people with disabilities as well as by some without disabilities. Its' membership is growing and it includes many different types of organizations from throughout the world -- In fact, the two most active regions in the RI family today are Asia and the Middle East (our Arab region).

Today, RI has four major aims: 1) to ensure opportunities for equal participation and equal rights for people with disabilities around the world, 2) to increase public awareness and improve public attitudes toward people with disabilities in society, 3) to ensure the provision and improve the quality of rehabilitation services worldwide, and 4) to prevent, where possible, disabilities caused by armed conflict, poverty, illness, birth defects, and societal mistreatment and neglect.

I invite you to join RI and become part of our 21st century re-invention. I believe you will find ample opportunities to contribute to the organization and I believe that by working together with disabled and non-disabled colleagues on issues of international significance, you will find ways to broaden your interests, expand your network of international friends and colleagues, and share in the pending achievements of our multi-faceted organization. Please do join us.

In the world today, in the most modern and advanced civilization known to man, people with disabilities are suffering on every continent, some more than ever before. It is not enough for us to say we have achieved a lot. It is not enough for us to say there are others capable of addressing the issues in the world today facing people with disabilities. It is not enough for us to say that the world has changed and our work is not relevant anymore. It is not enough to say that our governments do not support our work as they once did. It is not enough to say that our organizations are too small or that our dues are too high. It is not enough to say that our leadership is flawed or that our workers and our volunteers are tired.

There are more than 600 million people with disabilities in the world today. More than three-quarters of these people live in developing and poor countries, where poverty is the general rule. Large numbers of those who are most challenged live near here, on the Eastern and Southern doorsteps of Europe. Most people who have disabilities in these poor countries are on the very lowest end of the social and economic scale. They are surviving, virtually without hope, simply because their humanity and courage keeps them alive. Even in more developed and relatively rich countries, in Europe and in North America, people with disabilities are usually on the low end of the socio-economic scale.

I mentioned imperatives in my introduction – I believe that there are three imperatives to which we all must commit ourselves in order to ensure that people with disabilities are able to share in the future of human kind and even to obtain the basic amenities of life in the present time.

First, we must work together in partnership. We must stop fighting, stop competing, stop working at cross purposes. Groups representing different disabilities must work together, disabled and non-disabled people must work together, professionals and consumers must work together, disability leaders in developed and less developed countries must work together.

As one means of achieving the goal of partnership among cross-disability groups, the leaders of six major international disability organizations have formed the International Disability Alliance (IDA) to advocate for equality and social justice for people with disabilities around the world. For its part, Rehabilitation International is working to bring together consumers, advocates, family members, rehabilitation professionals, and government leaders to work on policies and programs designed to empower people with disabilities. Even with these exemplary efforts, there is a need for more work to resolve the differences between the various interest groups in the disability movement and to break down the barriers which prevent their coordinated and mutually supportive achievements.

Second, we must empower people with disabilities. Our governments must institute and enforce policies and laws which protect the rights and promote opportunities for people with disabilities, and they must assure that public services are equally accessible for all people with disabilities. Our commercial enterprises, businesses, and industries must implement procedures which allow their services and products to be accessible to people with disabilities, and they must provide employment and job development opportunities to people with disabilities. Our schools must fully address the educational needs of people with disabilities, and they must ensure that no one is left behind due to physical or programmatic barriers. Our mosques, churches, and synagogues must assure full access so that people with disabilities can find spiritual support as they wish. Our professions must actively encourage and recruit people with disabilities. Our social service organizations must identify, prioritize, and address the support service needs of people with disabilities in the community to assure that people are not prevented from reaching goals due to lack of services

or other infrastructure barriers, and they must strive to serve them in a manner which assures dignity and promotes independence.

People with disabilities should be empowered to make decisions which affect their lives. People with disabilities should be empowered to engage in independent living. People with disabilities must be empowered with rights to protect them from discrimination. In fact, people with disabilities must be empowered socially, culturally, politically, and economically.

Third, we must have a United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities which is enforceable and which extends assurances of assistance to every disabled person in every country of the world. Such a treaty will need to be supplemented and implemented by national laws.

Recently, there has been an encouraging trend toward implementation of national disability laws and policies that commit governments to providing access to necessary services and promoting inclusion in society. In addition, there are disability-specific instruments of the U.N., such as the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons and the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. However, these instruments, while useful in providing guidelines, are not legally binding.

A convention at the United Nations on the Rights of People with Disabilities offers these advantages: it would be well known to all people in the world, it would serve to collate all of the provisions and rules that address treatment of people with disabilities by member nations, and it would provide clearly understood and organized methods for enforcement of its provisions on behalf of people with disabilities.

I am convinced that now is the time for the global disability community to act in partnership to achieve full recognition of our rights and appropriate implementation of remedies to discrimination, including the provision of needed services and the opportunity to obtain economic as well as social justice.

I am fearful that as the world becomes a smaller place to live in, and as we all properly begin to share in the rich benefits of our human intellect and our planet, that we will compromise certain expectations and standards to which those of us in richer, more developed countries have grown accustomed.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues and friends: My intent, and my commitment, which I hope you share, is to work together with advocates and people with disabilities, with rehabilitation professionals and service providers, and with policy makers to set a high standard for services and support to people with disabilities and a fair standard for rights of people with disabilities, and to reach those standards so that people with disabilities everywhere can enjoy their lives; so they can have the opportunity to improve their standard of living and that of their families; so they can be fully contributing members of their respective families, communities and societies; and so they can contribute to improving the quality of life and standard of living for all other people throughout the world.

In order to achieve these goals, all of us must recognize our closeness to one another in a world where we are growing more interdependent every day, and we must work harmoniously together in partnership. Together, we can create a new future for people with disabilities around the world—and it will be a better one for us all.

Thank-you.

Funchess, Roxy

From: Lex Frieden [lfrieden@bcm.tmc.edu]
Sent: Friday, November 08, 2002 12:23 PM
To: Roxy at TIRR
Subject: FW: Speech ok?

-----Original Message-----

From: Tomas Lagerwall [mailto:sec_gen@rehab-international.org]
Sent: Friday, November 08, 2002 7:14 AM
To: Lex Frieden
Subject: RE: Speech ok?

Good morning Lex,

The speech I mailed you yesterday is meant for Aachen. Sorry.

Your speech is fine. Just a few comments:

Page one end; Asia **Pacific** region.

Page three middle; There are seven organizations forming IDA (not six)

Page four end; Why do you say a convention at the UN? It can be seen as marking a distance towards the UN (which people may interpret as a US view) Why not say We want a UN Convention or in this case; A UN Convention ... offers and underline being part of UN.

In some previous speeches you have said that it is difficult to see, when you meet people on the street, if they have a disability or not. This may be an appropriate moment to say it again. Our Dutch member organization is the Dutch Council for the Chronically Ill and the Disabled (Seems to the official translation) and I am sure they will appreciate a wider approach in particular if it comes from you.

Best regards and see you in Aachen

Tomas

During the past two years, as president of RI, I have been asked on several occasions: "Why should my organization belong to RI?" This is a pertinent question which I believe should be addressed in the context of strategic planning. I hope this letter helps to formulate a constructive discussion about RI's role in the world today. At the very least, I hope this communication will begin a dialogue which will help all of us to judge the relevance of RI now and in the future.

What is RI's role in today's world?

Rehabilitation International is an exceptional organization in many respects. It is the only international organization focusing on disability issues which welcomes into its membership any organization which is committed to its' goals and purposes, regardless of whether that organization is composed mostly of people with disabilities or not, regardless of whether it is governmental or nongovernmental, and regardless of whether it is made up mostly of professionals or non-professionals.

The classical paradigm for disability organizations is that of a "single disability type" organization. Most disability organizations in the world today, including those which operate on a global scale, are of the single disability type design. Membership in these organizations is limited by certain characteristics, and to qualify for membership, one must be "diagnosed" with a specific type of disability or symptomatology. These organizations generally focus their work strictly on issues which directly affect the members of their organization, and some of them are quite effective in doing so. For example, the World Federation of the Deaf and the World Blind Union have been very successful in achieving social and political goals benefiting deaf people and blind people around the world. Occasionally, the interests of single disability type organizations overlap with other groups, and when this occurs, they have sometimes been able to work together in a coordinated fashion to achieve common objectives. Such coordination is occurring now, through IDA (the International Disability Alliance), in an effort to achieve a United Nations convention on the rights of people with disabilities.

Somewhat counter to the single disability type organizational paradigm is that of the "cross disability type" paradigm. In the disability movement, we talk about "cross disability" organizations, meaning those which include people with many types of disabilities. In my view, the so-called cross disability paradigm is a constructive one, because it acknowledges the commonalities associated with the disability experience, regardless of the cause or reason for disability. Theoretically, this paradigm may also promote unity among and across disability organizations, and it may create a powerful political coalition among all people with disabilities, regardless of the type of disability which they might have. Disabled People International (DPI) is a grassroots cross disability organization. DPI's motto is "nothing about us without us". As one of the founders of DPI, and as an active member of the US DPI affiliate (which is also the US RI affiliate), I believe in this philosophy and I am committed to having a strong alliance with DPI on matters of common concern.

Another type of organization in the disability field which is pervasive throughout the world is the "voluntary service organization". Voluntary service organizations are usually made up of nondisabled people who have a compassionate desire or a sense of moral responsibility to help others whom they sometimes judge as weaker or less fortunate than themselves. In years gone by, these types of organizations were often the only ones available to provide assistance to people with disabilities. For this reason, they were vital to sustaining the lives and providing a modicum of opportunity to many people with disabilities throughout the world. Recently, this type of organization has been labeled by disability groups, sociologists, and other observers as "patronizing" and therefore in conflict with the modern disability movement theory of independence and empowerment.

In many places in the world, voluntary service organizations have been supplanted by government-run organizations and by commercially organized, profit making organizations. Most of these organizations are still patronizing in the sense that they provide few opportunities for the consumers of their services (people with disabilities) to make decisions about the way in which their services are provided or by whom. On the other hand, they are generally somewhat more stable than most voluntary service organizations, because they are supported or subsidized in large measure by government funding. Such stability enables them to maintain permanent facilities and to employ professional staffs. Even some voluntary service organizations have adopted a professional approach to service delivery, enabling them to construct permanent facilities and to employ professional staff persons.

The principal differences between the "disability organizations" and the "service organizations" are 1) the disability organizations are usually made up strictly by people with disabilities while the service organizations are usually made up strictly by people without disabilities, and 2) the disability organizations usually focus their work on advocacy, with service provision being of secondary emphasis, if at all; while the service organizations usually focus their work on service provision, with advocacy being of secondary emphasis, if at all.

One other type of organization which is prevalent in the field of disabilities is the professional association. Professional associations are usually individual membership organizations whose members choose to associate themselves because they all work in the same specialty occupation. Obviously, these organizations are primarily concerned about issues which pertain to their professions, but they occasionally associate themselves with other organizations to advocate on behalf of the persons whom they serve. Best known among the professional associations in the field of rehabilitation are the World Federation of Occupational Therapy, the World Confederation on Physical Therapy, and the International Rehabilitation Medicine Association.

In contrast to both the "single disability type" and "cross disability type" paradigms and the "service organizations" and "professional associations" is Rehabilitation International (RI). In my view, the Rehabilitation International paradigm is "trans-disability". In other words, Rehabilitation International welcomes into its membership all people, regardless

of whether they have a disability or not, regardless of what type of disability they may have, and regardless of what type of interest they may have in disability, be it voluntary, professional or consumer, governmental or nongovernmental, or otherwise. To me, the trans-disability paradigm is unique in the sense that it not only crosses disability types, but it also bridges the gaps between people with disabilities and those without, and between service providers and advocates. In this respect, Rehabilitation International is absolutely unique in the international disability movement today.

RI is also unique in its precedence. Born in 1922, RI has given service to people with disabilities, their families and our society for more than eight decades. During this time, the members of Rehabilitation International have been responsible for beginning many important initiatives. In 1931, RI developed and presented the first bill of rights for children with disabilities to the League of Nations. More recently, the organization has authored the Charter for the '80s, and in 1999, it unveiled the Charter for the New Millennium, both of which called for international action to ensure equality and protect the rights of people with disabilities. Through the good efforts of our dedicated members, our organization has had a profound impact on society's treatment of people with disabilities, thereby improving the lives of many, many people with disabilities.

Is RI needed in today's world?

Obviously RI is a relatively old organization, with a memorable history and a record of achievement. Now, at the beginning of the 21st century, one may responsibly ask: "Is there a need to perpetuate Rehabilitation International?" The answer is clear to me. "Yes, I believe Rehabilitation International is important in today's world and it should be perpetuated."

In the world today, in the most modern and advanced civilization known to man, people with disabilities are suffering on every continent, some more than ever before. It is not enough for us to say we have achieved a lot. It is not enough for us to say there are other organizations capable of addressing the issues in the world today facing people with disabilities. It is not enough for us to say that the world has changed and RI is not relevant anymore. It is not enough to say that our governments do not support our work as they once did. It is not enough to say that our organization is too small or that our dues are too high. It is not enough to say that our leadership is flawed or that our volunteers are tired.

There are more than 600 million people with disabilities in the world today. More than three-quarters of these people live in developing and poor countries, where poverty is the general rule. Most people who have disabilities in these poor countries are on the very lowest end of the social and economic scale. They are surviving, virtually without hope, simply because their humanity and courage keeps them alive. Even in more developed and relatively rich countries, people with disabilities are usually on the low end of the scale.

Without question, other organizations are concerned about these realities and they are doing what they can to address the causal issues. But Rehabilitation International is the only organization with a mandate to address these issues across the broad spectrum of disability. Further, it is the only organization with a structure in place that is capable of bringing all the varied interests committed to resolving these issues to bear.

RI is the only international non-governmental organization (NGO) that includes in its membership all people interested in disability issues -- policymakers, service providers, medical rehabilitationists -- doctors and therapists, vocational rehabilitationists, special educators, employers, trade union representatives, philanthropists, engineers, jurists, family members of people with disabilities and people with disabilities. It is the only international disability organization that addresses issues pertaining to all disability groups regardless of etiology, diagnosis, time of onset or cause of disability

Today, RI has four major aims: 1) to ensure opportunities for equal participation and equal rights for people with disabilities around the world, 2) to increase public awareness and improve public attitudes toward people with disabilities in society, 3) to ensure the provision and improve the quality of rehabilitation services worldwide, and 4) to prevent, where possible, disabilities caused by armed conflict, poverty, illness, birth defects, and societal mistreatment and neglect. On what more important issues could there be to work; and what other organization is better suited to do so by its historical commitment and current broad representation than RI?

Is RI ready to meet the challenges of the 21st century?

RI is needed in today's world, but it faces challenges. As members, it is our duty to address the strategic questions that are before us in order to insure that RI's mission is fully supported by our actions. It is also our responsibility to refine and adjust our current structure so that we can effectively carry out our plans now and in the future.

Clearly, the current organizational structure of RI needs strengthening. We need a broader base of support, both in terms of representation and in terms of finances. In terms of representation, RI must recruit and involve people from developing countries and from regions where there is currently an absence of member organizations. From a fiscal standpoint, we must face the reality that at least three out of four persons with a disability live in the developing world. While organizations in poor countries may be more likely to benefit from RI's services than member organizations in more highly industrialized countries, they are also most likely to be unable to pay high membership fees. Unfortunately, in the present changing world economy, even member organizations from richer countries have difficulty sustaining historical levels of support. Dues levels for RI members are currently set at the lowest level possible to support a minimal level of effort and services to members.

As RI members, we must recommit ourselves to meeting the challenges of insuring RI's productivity today, and its relevance in the future. Further, our commitment must

compel us to solve the perplexities required to strengthen our organizational structure and economic base so that we can more effectively address current demands. Only by planning and working together can we be ready to meet the unescapable realities of the 21st century.

Why should my organization belong to RI?

RI member organizations, the individuals who belong to and participate in these organizations, RI commissions and their members, and individual members of RI are meaningfully involved, both directly and indirectly, in international discussions about important issues in rehabilitation, in international networking through the international exchange of information and expertise, and in the process of international policy development, standard-setting, and rulemaking. RI, through its members, has important work to do.

RI members have the opportunity to support important international initiatives. They have the opportunity to network with, learn from, and share ideas with other people from different countries and cultures. They have the opportunity to help plan, organize and participate in international meetings and seminars. They have the opportunity to develop and practice leadership skills in an international environment. Perhaps most importantly, they have the opportunity to build RI into an organization that can offer hope to millions of people with disabilities who live without hope today.

It seems to me that there must be many reasons to belong to RI. To some extent, I think the most compelling reasons must be personal. In my case, RI enables me to channel my passion for making the world a better place for all of us to live by providing me with projects on which to work together with friends around the world. I hope you share my personal passion enough to join me in helping RI meet its' challenges so that the answer to the question "Why should my organization belong to RI?" will be self evident.

I believe that there are three imperatives to which we must commit ourselves in order to ensure that people with disabilities are able to share in the future of human kind and even to obtain the basic amenities of life in the present time.

First, we must work together in partnership. We must stop fighting, stop competing, stop working at cross purposes. Groups representing different disabilities must work together, disabled and non-disabled people must work together, professionals and consumers must work together, disability leaders in developed and less developed countries must work together.

As one means of achieving the goal of partnership among cross-disability groups, the leaders of six major international disability organizations have formed the International Disability Alliance (IDA) to advocate for equality and social justice for people with

disabilities around the world. For its part, Rehabilitation International is working to bring together consumers, advocates, family members, rehabilitation professionals, and government leaders to work on policies and programs designed to empower people with disabilities. Even with these exemplary efforts, there is a need for more work to resolve the differences between the various interest groups in the disability movement and to break down the barriers which prevent their coordinated and mutually supportive achievements.

Second, we must empower people with disabilities. Our governments must institute and enforce policies and laws which protect the rights and promote opportunities for people with disabilities, and they must assure that public services are equally accessible for all people with disabilities. Our commercial enterprises, businesses, and industries must implement procedures which allow their services and products to be accessible to people with disabilities, and they must provide employment and job development opportunities to people with disabilities. Our schools must fully address the educational needs of people with disabilities, and they must ensure that no one is left behind due to physical or programmatic barriers. Our mosques, churches, and synagogues must assure full access so that people with disabilities can find spiritual support as they wish. Our professions must actively encourage and recruit people with disabilities. Our social service organizations must identify, prioritize, and address the support service needs of people with disabilities in the community to assure that people are not prevented from reaching goals due to lack of services or other infrastructure barriers, and they must strive to serve them in a manner which assures dignity and promotes independence.

People with disabilities should be empowered to make decisions which affect their lives. People with disabilities should be empowered to engage in independent living, as they may choose. People with disabilities must be empowered with rights to protect them from discrimination. In fact, people with disabilities must be empowered socially, culturally, politically, and economically.

Third, we must have a United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities which is enforceable and which extends assurances of assistance to every disabled person in every country of the world. In U.N. parlance, the term "convention" means "treaty," as opposed to a convention or meeting in the usual sense. Such a treaty will need to be supplemented and implemented by national laws. It should be noted that there has been an encouraging trend in the recent past toward implementation of national disability laws and policies that commit governments to providing access to necessary services and promoting inclusion in society. In addition, there are disability-specific instruments of the U.N., such as the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons and the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. Of course, these instruments, while useful in providing guidelines, are not legally binding.

A convention at the United Nations on the Rights of People with Disabilities offers these advantages: it would be well known to all people in the world, it would serve to collate all of the provisions and rules that address treatment of people with disabilities by member

nations, and it would provide clearly understood and organized methods for enforcement of its provisions on behalf of people with disabilities.

I am convinced that now is the time for the global disability community to act in partnership to achieve full recognition of our rights and appropriate implementation of remedies to discrimination, including the provision of needed services and the opportunity to obtain economic as well as social justice. I am fearful that as the world becomes a smaller place to live in, and as we all properly begin to share in the rich benefits of our human intellect and our planet, that we will compromise certain expectations and standards to which those of us in richer, more developed countries have grown accustomed. Our shared commitment should be to set a high standard and to reach that standard so people with disabilities everywhere can enjoy their lives; so they can have the opportunity to improve their standard of living and that of their families; so they can be fully contributing members of their respective families, communities and societies; and so they can contribute to improving the quality of life and standard of living for all other people throughout the world.

Now is the time to act by implementing that which we know, by committing ourselves to standards like those of the U.N. Standard Rules, to enact new laws when necessary, and to ensure appropriate treatment of and protection for the rights of people with disabilities. We need to do this in our individual states and nations, we need to do it in regional bodies like the European Union and the North American Free Trade Alliance, and we need to do it globally, at the level of the United Nations.

Now is the time for the disability community, nationally and internationally, to act by securing and implementing a U.N. Convention which will ensure appropriate treatment of and protection for the rights of all people with disabilities. I believe that we must have this convention before the end of this first decade of the 21st century. In order to achieve this goal, all of us must recognize our closeness to one another in a world where we are growing more interdependent every day, and we must work together in partnership. Together, we can create a new future for people with disabilities around the world--and it will be a better one for us all.

Ladies and gentlemen, and friends, now is the time to act and to be serious about what we do. I am fearful that as the world becomes a smaller place to live in, and as we all properly begin to share in the rich benefits of our human intellect and our planet, that we will compromise certain expectations and standards to which those of us in richer, more developed countries have grown accustomed. My intent, and my commitment, which I hope you share, is to work together to set a high standard and to reach that standard so people with disabilities everywhere can enjoy their lives; so they can have the opportunity to improve their standard of living and that of their families; so they can be fully contributing members of their respective families, communities and societies; and so they can contribute to improving the quality of life and standard of living for all other people throughout the world.

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Remarks by Lex Frieden
Aachen, Germany
November 11, 2002

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Thank-you to the sponsoring organizations and thank-you to all of the people who have worked so hard to make this a successful conference. I appreciate your hospitality and I look forward to the stimulating program which you have planned for us.

In my remarks this morning, I will share with you some thoughts about Rehabilitation International, the organization which I am representing here today. I will also briefly discuss three imperatives - important goals to which I believe we should all be committed.

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But I implore you not to jump to such conclusions... Today, RI is an exceptional organization in many positive respects. Today, RI is the only international organization focusing on disability issues which welcomes into its membership any organization which is committed to its' goals and purposes, regardless of whether that organization is composed mostly of people with disabilities or not, regardless of whether it is governmental or nongovernmental, and regardless of whether it is made up mostly of professionals or non-professionals. Further, today, RI is a vibrant, dynamic organization lead by people with disabilities as well as by some without disabilities. Its'

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I mentioned imperatives in my introduction -- I believe that there are three imperatives to which we all must commit ourselves in order to ensure that people with disabilities are able to share in the future of human kind and even to obtain the basic amenities of life in the present time.

First, we must work together in partnership. We must stop fighting, stop competing, stop working at cross purposes. Groups representing different disabilities must work together, disabled and non-disabled people must work together, professionals and consumers must work together, disability leaders in developed and less developed countries must work together.

As one means of achieving the goal of partnership among cross disability groups, the leaders of seven major international disability organizations have formed the International Disability Alliance (IDA) to advocate for equality and social justice for people with disabilities around the world. For its part, Rehabilitation International is working to bring together consumers, advocates, family members, rehabilitation professionals, and government leaders to work on policies and programs designed to empower people with disabilities. Even with these exemplary efforts, there is a need for more work to resolve the differences between the various interest groups in the disability movement and to break down the barriers which prevent their coordinated and mutually supportive

membership is growing and it includes many different types of organizations from throughout the world -- In fact, the two most active regions in the RI family today are Asia Pacific and the Middle East (our Arab region).

Today, RI has four major aims: 1) to ensure opportunities for equal participation and equal rights for people with disabilities around the world, 2) to increase public awareness and improve public attitudes toward people with disabilities in society, 3) to ensure the provision and improve the quality of rehabilitation services worldwide, and 4) to prevent, where possible, disabilities caused by armed conflict, poverty, illness, birth defects, and societal mistreatment and neglect.

I invite you to join RI and become part of our 21st century re-invention. I believe you will find ample opportunities to contribute to the organization and I believe that by working together with disabled and non-disabled colleagues on issues of international significance, you will find ways to broaden your interests, expand your network of international friends and colleagues, and share in the pending achievements of our multi-faceted organization. Please do join us.

In the world today, in the most modern and advanced civilization known to man, people with disabilities are suffering on every continent, some more than ever before. It is not enough for us to say we have achieved a lot. It is not enough for us to say there are others capable of addressing the issues in the world today facing people with disabilities. It is not enough for us to say that the world has changed and our work is not relevant anymore. It is not enough to say that our governments do not support our work as they once did. It is not enough to say that our organizations are too small or that our dues are too high. It is not enough to say that our leadership is flawed or that our workers and our volunteers are tired.

There are more than 600 million people with disabilities in the world today. More than three-quarters of these people live in developing