

## Glossary

**Accession** – this is a way in which a country can become a States Party to a convention. Normally a country will sign and then ratify the convention to which it wants to become a States Party. Accession refers to a country signing and ratifying all at the same time. When a country does this we say that it has “acceded” to the convention.

**Adoption** – this is when a proposed convention is officially finished and opened for countries to join.

**Civil society** – this term has many different definitions. Here it is used to refer broadly to non-governmental organizations and institutions, primarily those operating in the non-profit sector, ie. not businesses.

**Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** – this is the body established by the Convention that is responsible for monitoring implementation of the Convention at the international level. It will consider reports from States Parties regarding the steps they have taken to implement the Convention, and in some instances will be able to consider complaints of violations of the Convention.

**Convention** – a legally binding document, in writing, between two or more countries. (Also sometimes known as a “treaty,” “protocol,” “covenant,” “agreement,” or “pact.”). The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is available here.

**Core international human rights conventions** – this term refers to the group of UN human rights conventions that each establishes a committee of experts to monitor implementation. (See also “treaty monitoring body.”) The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is the eighth such core convention.

**Customary international law** – this is a type of international law that develops as a result of State practice. When enough States engage in a particular practice or action because they feel that they are legally obliged to do so, then we say that the practice or action has become part of customary international law. (How many States are “enough” depends on the nature of the practice in question.) Unless a State has persistently objected to the development of a particular custom under international law, it is legally

obliged to comply with that custom. Treaties are sometimes used to write down or 'codify' practices that have previously only been part of customary international law.

**Entry into force** – this is when a convention becomes active, meaning that States Parties must act to implement their obligations under the convention. Usually a convention will specify that a certain number of countries must become States Parties before the convention can enter into force. In the case of the CRPD, 20 countries must become States Parties before the convention enters into force.

**General Assembly** – this is the main deliberative organ of the United Nations. Each UN Member State is entitled to be represented in the work of the General Assembly, and each UN Member State has one vote in decisions taken by the General Assembly.

**Human rights** – these are the rights that everyone has just by being human. You don't have to be a member of a particular group, and nobody needs to give you your rights. Everyone is automatically entitled to enjoy the full range of human rights just because they are human.

**Human rights convention** – this is a convention that deals specifically with the topic of human rights.

**International Bill of Human Rights** – this is the name used to refer to the three foundational documents of all international human rights law: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

**International cooperation** – this is a broad term used to refer to the various ways in which States can work together to fulfill their obligations. International cooperation can take the form of international development aid, but it also relates to the sharing of experiences, technologies, and knowledge – all of which can be done between and among both developed and developing countries.

**International law** – this refers to those laws that are common to a variety of different countries. We find international law in a number of different places, including international conventions, and customary international law.

**Monitoring** – in international law this involves checking to see if a States Party is taking whatever actions it needs to take in order to comply with its legal obligations under a convention.

**Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)** – as described on its website, the OHCHR, “a department of the United Nations Secretariat, is mandated to promote and protect the enjoyment and full realization, by all people, of all rights established in the Charter of the United Nations and in international human rights laws and treaties. The mandate includes preventing human rights violations, securing respect for all human rights, promoting international cooperation to protect human rights, coordinating related activities throughout the United Nations, and strengthening and streamlining the United Nations system in the field of human rights. In addition to its mandated responsibilities, the Office leads efforts to integrate a human rights approach within all work carried out by United Nations agencies.”

**Optional protocol** – this is a type of convention that is added onto an existing convention. It is not typically used to change or amend the convention to which it is attached, but rather it addresses additional issues not covered by the underlying convention. Often these additional issues are somewhat controversial in nature. Countries can decide whether or not they want to become States Parties to the optional protocol.

**Progressive realization** – this is a principle of international law that applies only to economic, social and cultural rights, and *not* to civil and political rights. Although States always have an immediate obligation to undertake their human rights obligations, progressive realization allows States to implement their economic, social and cultural rights obligations only to the extent that they have resources available to do so. For States with very limited resources, progressive realization allows them to take more time to implement their economic, social and cultural rights obligations. States wishing to do this must indicate to the relevant monitoring bodies their reasons for doing so, and must develop and act upon plans that show how they will effectively implement their economic, social and cultural rights obligations as they obtain the resources to do so.

**Ratification** – this is where a country officially decides that it wants to become a States Party to a convention, and when it does this we say that the country “ratifies” the convention. This is a very serious decision, and

each country has its own rules about who can make that decision and what decision-making process should be used. A “ratification instrument” is a document that lets other countries know that a country has officially decided to become a States Party to a convention. The ratification instrument is usually submitted to the secretariat for the convention. For most UN human rights instruments, ratification instruments are deposited with the United Nations Secretary General.

**RUDs** – this acronym stands for “reservations, understandings and declarations.” RUDs can be used by countries to exempt themselves from particular provisions in a convention, or to describe how they think specific language in a convention should be interpreted. RUDs are filed by a country at the same time they submit their ratification instrument.

**Signatory** – this is where a country has signed but not yet ratified a convention. Being a signatory means that the country has indicated that it agrees with the main idea of the convention, that it agrees it will not take any action to violate the main idea of the convention, and that it is interested in becoming a States Party in the future. Being a signatory does not mean that the country is legally required to comply with all the specific provisions of the convention, as it must when it is a States Party.

**Social/cultural model of disability** – this is a way of looking at the issue of disability, focusing not on the individual and their physical or mental characteristics, but looking instead at the interaction of the individual and society. The social/cultural model of disability proposes that the problems faced by persons with disabilities are not the result of the person’s impairment(s), but are instead the result of barriers in society. These barriers may be physical, attitudinal, legislative, informational, or any other kind of barrier resulting from a society or culture’s failure to accommodate a person.

**States Party** – this is a country that has chosen to join a convention. As a result, the country is legally bound to comply with its obligations under the convention. A country can usually become a States Party either by signing and then ratifying the convention, or acceding to the convention. (See also “signatory,” “ratification,” and “accession.”)

**Thematic human rights conventions** – these are human rights conventions that deal with specific human rights issues (like racial

discrimination or torture), or a particular group of people (like women or migrant workers). These conventions do not create new rights, but rather they elaborate existing rights in the context of a specific group or issue area.

**Treaty** – see “Convention”

**Treaty monitoring body** – this is a committee of experts mandated to oversee and monitor the implementation of a convention. Typically, a convention will indicate how large the committee will be, the criteria for selection of members, when and where the committee will meet, and what the committee is authorized to do in monitoring implementation. Many committees receive reports from States Parties describing what the country has done to implement its obligations under a convention. The committee will usually have an opportunity to ask questions of the States Party about the report, and then provide feedback in response to the report. Committees may also be mandated to issue general comments giving their interpretation of the convention. Some Committees can receive complaints from individuals and/or groups concerned that a States Party is violating its obligations under the convention.

**United Nations (UN)** – this is an inter-governmental membership organization that was founded in 1945 and has headquarters in New York and Geneva. As described in its Charter (the international convention that established the UN), the UN is dedicated to maintaining international peace and security; developing friendly relations among nations; cooperating in solving international economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems and in promoting respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; and to be a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in attaining these ends.

**United Nations Member State** – this is a country that has chosen to join the United Nations. To join the UN, a country must become a States Party to the UN Charter – this is an international convention with which UN Member States are legally obligated to comply. When the UN began in 1945 there were 51 Member States, but membership has grown dramatically since then, and as of 2006 there are 192 UN Member States.