

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 is where a country signs and ratifies 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.

Convention – a legally binding document, in writing, between two or more countries. (Also sometimes known as a “treaty,” “protocol,” “covenant,” “agreement,” or “pact.”)

Core international human rights conventions – this term refers to the group of UN human rights conventions that each establish a committee of experts to monitor implementation. (See also “treaty monitoring body.”) There are currently seven such core conventions, and it is anticipated that the disability Convention will become the eighth such convention.

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.

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.

Implementation - involves States Parties taking whatever actions they need to in order to comply with their legal obligations under a convention.

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 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 in order to comply with its legal obligations under a convention.

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Ratification – this is where a country officially decides that it wants to become a State 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.

Ratification instrument – this 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 State 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 State 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 2002 there are 191 Member States.