

# The Disabilities Treaty: Opening the World to Americans with Disabilities

## Benefits for Veterans and Service Members

*The Disabilities Treaty is the single most important step we can take to ensure that millions of disabled Americans enjoy the same protections abroad as they do here.*

*This treaty offers hope where there is none.*

*- Secretary of State John Kerry*

*Ratification of this treaty [...] would keep faith with generations of disabled veterans, who have served this nation faithfully and with distinction.*

*- Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki*

**Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Disabilities Treaty) will help enable the United States to export its standards for access and opportunity worldwide, making it easier for our wounded warriors, disabled veterans, and their families to take advantage of opportunities abroad.**

Our disabled veterans and military families want to work, study, serve, and travel abroad with the same dignity and respect as other Americans. But doing so can be difficult, if not impossible, when other countries have poor accessibility standards and other barriers to opportunity.

- There are approximately 5.5 million disabled American veterans, more than 3.5 million of whom are receiving compensation for a disability. There are also at least 126,000 military family members with special needs.
- More than 325,000 American service members and their families are stationed abroad, many in countries with accessibility standards significantly lower than or incompatible with our own.
- Of the nearly 1 million veterans and their beneficiaries that have taken advantage of the Post-9/11 GI Bill since its inception four years ago, about twenty percent have a disability. These students are usually precluded from studying abroad because of poor accessibility standards at institutions of higher learning overseas. Overall, students with disabilities participate in study abroad programs less than half as often as those without disabilities.
- Disabled veterans and military service members are among America's most elite and accomplished athletes. Ten veterans and service members represented the U.S. at the 2013 International Paralympic Committee World Championships, and more will compete for Team U.S.A. at the 2014 Paralympics Winter Games. But international competition often poses significant hurdles for many of these athletes due to sub-par accessibility standards overseas.

**Ratification of the Disabilities Treaty will also put the U.S. in the best position to export our gold standard disability laws to allied countries whose troops have fought alongside ours in places like Afghanistan and Iraq.** While 42 International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) members have ratified the Treaty, accessibility standards in most of those countries remain low or different from our own.

*U.S. ratification of the [treaty] will improve physical, technological, and communication access outside the U.S., thereby helping to ensure that Americans—particularly, many thousands of disabled American veterans—have equal opportunities to live, work, and travel abroad.*

*- Bob Dole, retired U.S. Senator and disabled American veteran*