

**Press Statement
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Disabilities Treaty Could Make a Difference in New York

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Disability advocates in New York City have cause to celebrate today as dignitaries from around the world gathered at the United Nations to sign a landmark treaty that will protect the rights of people with disabilities.

For the world's largest minority – 650 million people with disabilities globally – the treaty would ensure that society doesn't just act charitably now and then towards those with disabilities, but rather makes their equality a guarantee, a concrete policy. But that promise only exists for countries that signed on – and the United States, sadly, did not.

The US claims that the Americans with Disabilities Act already addresses the treaty's stipulations, but right here in New York City, the disabled are left behind daily.

Less than 1% of licensed yellow taxis are accessible to wheelchair users, none cover the needs of blind, deaf or visually impaired, and most subway and railroad stations in the five boroughs do not accommodate wheelchairs.

These inequalities persist, in spite of the legal apparatus the ADA offers to prevent and challenge them.

A better policy would prevent these disparities – an unintentional, but ingrained form of discrimination – from happening in the first place.

A new law will soon be proposed in city council in April, Human Rights GOAL, that would make human rights a measure of good governance and stop discrimination before it happens. It would require city agencies to assess their own policies and proactively identify and resolve practices that, knowingly or not, discriminate against the disabled and other minorities through hiring practices, service delivery and basic rights to things like education.

The United States might not have the leadership to commit to a treaty granting the disabled inviolable human rights, but that doesn't mean New York can't put an end to its unintended discriminatory practices. Let's hope the Mayor and City Council have the better sense to sign on to what is right.