



# Press Release

## Note No. 6138

Department of Public Information • News and Media Division • New York

Note to Correspondents

### **UNITED NATIONS MARKS FIRST WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY TODAY**

The United Nations will mark the first official World Autism Awareness Day on Wednesday, 2 April, to highlight the need to help improve the lives of children and adults who suffer from the disorder. The United Nations General Assembly unanimously declared 2 April as World Autism Awareness Day last November.

“On this day, the United Nations reaffirms its commitment to the rights and well-being of people with disabilities – a commitment rooted in our fundamental principle of universal human rights for all,” United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in a statement marking the day. “It is especially fitting that this inaugural Day falls in 2008 – the year in which we celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the United Nations Declaration for Human Rights and expect to see the entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted by the General Assembly in 2006.”

Autism is a complex brain disorder that affects people on all continents. It inhibits a person’s ability to communicate and develop social relationships, and is often accompanied by extreme behavioural challenges.

The Day will be marked at United Nations Headquarters in New York with a panel discussion sponsored by Qatar along with the World Health Organization and the non-governmental organization Autism Speaks. The event, which will take from 3 p.m. to 5:45 p.m. in Conference Room 1, will be moderated by Riz Khan from Al Jazeera International. General Assembly President Srgjan Kerim and Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs Sha Zukang will address the panel, and representatives from Governments, the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations, academia and civil society will participate.

Tomorrow, 3 April, the United Nations Department of Information will hold a briefing for non-governmental organizations, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. in Conference Room 1, with representatives from major autism organizations, the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, and the media. For more information, please visit the Department of Public Information NGO Section’s website: [www.un.org/dpi/ngosection/index.asp](http://www.un.org/dpi/ngosection/index.asp).

In both events, participants will speak about their personal efforts in raising awareness and eliminating stigma associated with autism, discuss the daily struggles of people with autism and highlight the importance of a better understanding of the disorder. They will also share personal perspectives on the impact of autism both locally and globally.

For more information on World Autism Awareness Day, please contact Franck Kuwonu, Department of Public Information, tel.: +1 212 963 8264; e-mail: [Kuwonu@un.org](mailto:Kuwonu@un.org).

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