



Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

DISABILITY ACTION STRATEGY 2017-20

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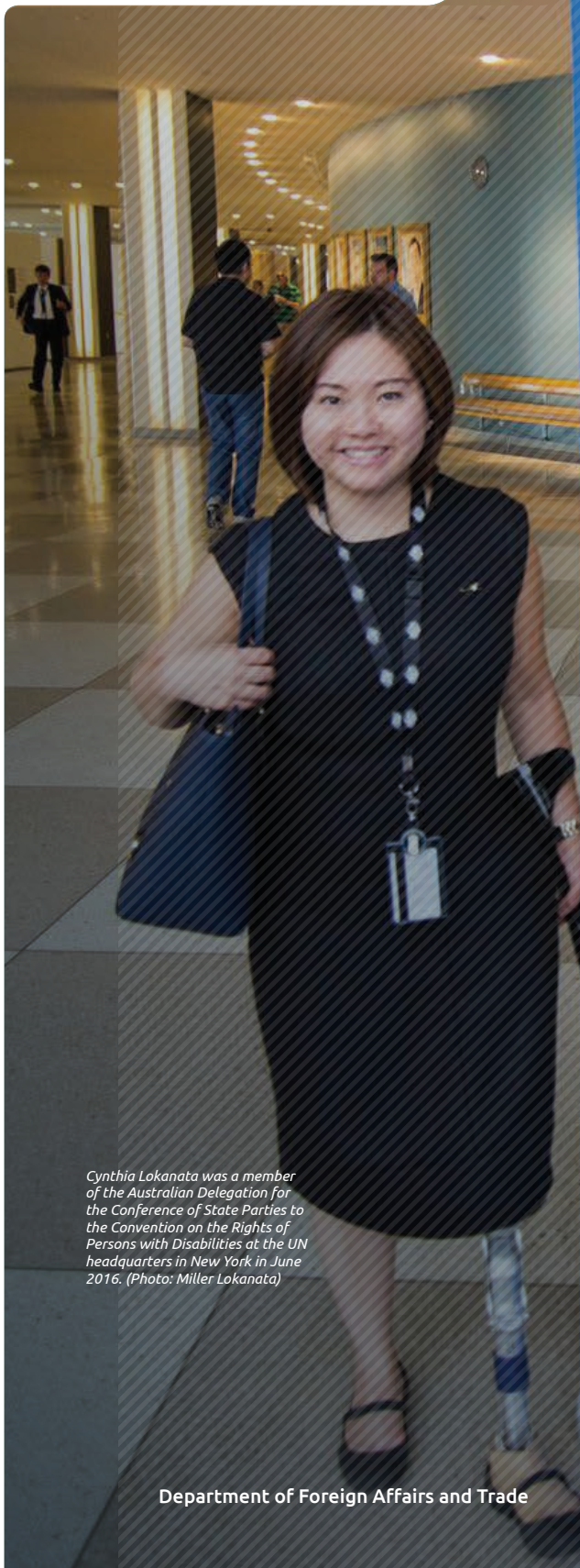
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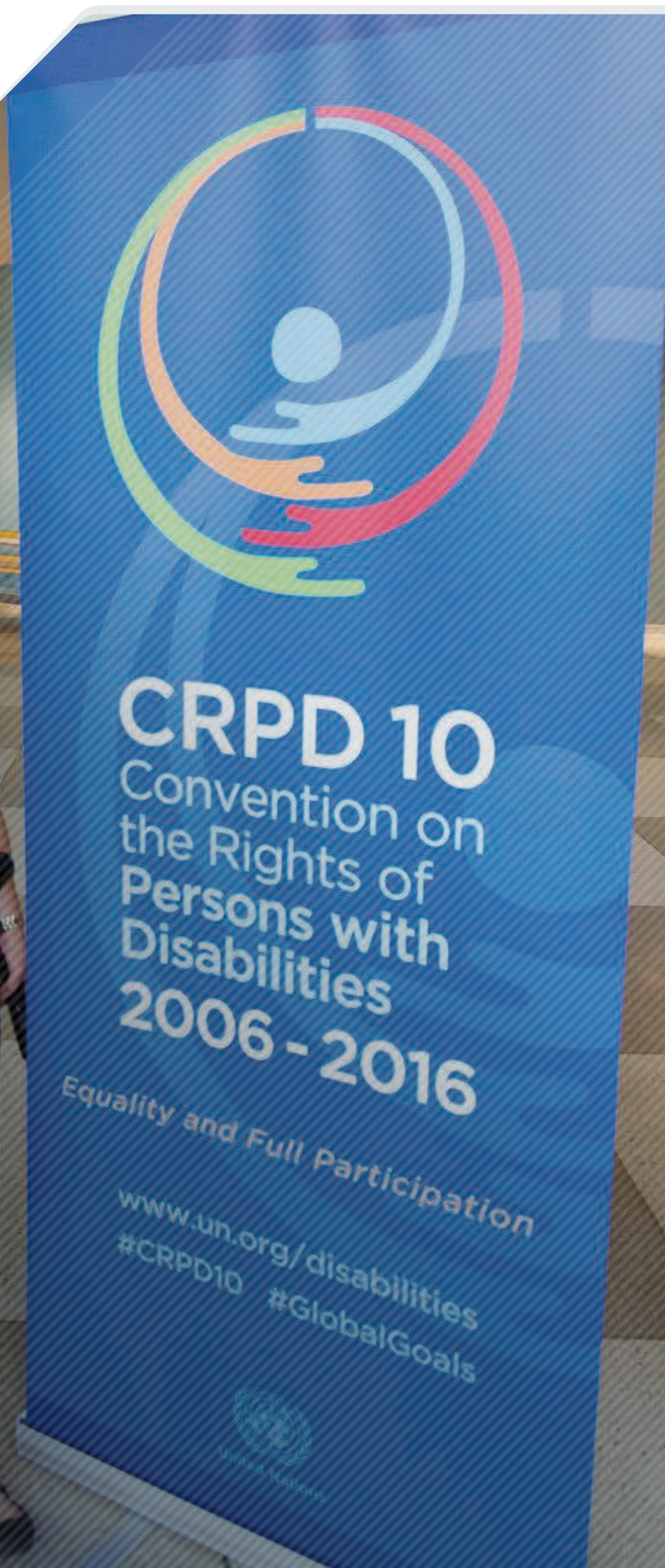
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Cynthia Lokanata was a member of the Australian Delegation for the Conference of State Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities at the UN headquarters in New York in June 2016. (Photo: Miller Lokanata)



MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY



The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) aims to be an employer of choice for staff with disability, indeed a model employer in the Australian Public Service.

I am proud to launch DFAT's second Disability Action Strategy which builds on successful initiatives already underway and outlines new actions that will underpin our achievements as a high-performing department into the future.

There is no question that diversity and inclusivity are key to maintaining a modern, agile workforce and it is essential that we continue to develop and harness the full range of skills and capabilities in all our staff.

I commend this strategy to you.

Frances Adamson

Secretary

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) supports an inclusive work culture in which all staff can reach their full potential and contribute to the achievement of our strategic goals.

The *DFAT Disability Action Strategy 2017–2020* sets out our commitment to address barriers that may prevent people with disability from gaining access to employment, development and promotional opportunities within DFAT.

DFAT's commitment is consistent with Australia's National Disability Strategy, which commits all levels of government to improving life for Australians with disability, their families and carers.



Patrick Joyce, DFAT Staff Member, prepares to share his experiences at DFAT's first 'six plus six' conversation between six staff with disability and six members of the Senior Executive Service as part of International Day of Persons with Disabilities activities in 2015.



- 1 1% OF AUSTRALIANS ARE AFFECTED BY **AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER**
- 2 2% OF AUSTRALIANS HAVE AN **INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY**
- 3 10% OF AUSTRALIANS HAVE **DYSLEXIA**
- 4 15% OF AUSTRALIANS HAVE A **PHYSICAL DISABILITY**
- 5 17% OF AUSTRALIANS ARE AFFECTED BY **HEARING LOSS**

UNDERSTANDING DISABILITY

Disability is a complex and multidimensional issue. The 2016 Australian Public Service Census reports that 5 per cent of DFAT staff identified as being a person with disability. Disability includes long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments that can, in interaction with various barriers, hinder a person's full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Such barriers may be physical, and include lack of:

- access to buildings with ramps, wide doors and elevators
- appropriate workspace furniture, toilet or kitchen facilities
- enabling computer technology for vision or hearing impairment.

Barriers may also be attitudinal, such as underestimating potential because of perceived limitation of a person's disability.

Historically, the medical model of disability focuses on a health condition that medical professionals need to fix or cure. This model focuses on what a person cannot do and cannot be.

We have adopted the social model of disability, which focuses on changing society to support people living with impairment; rather than changing people living with impairment to accommodate society. This model is supported by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which Australia signed in 2007.



ALMOST ONE IN FIVE AUSTRALIANS
REPORT LIVING WITH DISABILITY



THIS FIGURE RISES TO 37% OF
INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS OF WORKING AGE

DISABILITY DIVERSITY: WHY IT'S IMPORTANT FOR DFAT

Our *Disability Action Strategy 2017-2020* sets out what we will do to achieve our goal of being a model employer and APS-leader in disability inclusive practice.

Supporting staff with disability is firstly the right thing to do. But it's not just for this reason that this is so important. Employing and deploying a diverse workforce of skilled and motivated staff around the world and within Australia helps us to achieve our role: to help make Australia stronger, safer and more prosperous by promoting and protecting Australian interests internationally and contributing to global stability and economic growth¹. Enhanced diversity in our workforce—including, but not limited to, disability diversity—is a direct investment in enabling us to achieve our priorities.

As the home of Australia's foreign service, we believe in the principle that our foreign service should reflect the full diversity of the people it represents. Diversity has practical benefits also. DFAT achieves better results when it more accurately represents the diversity of the Australian people. Staff diversity gives us an edge: a deeper pool of knowledge and experience that helps us better interpret, explain and engage with increasingly complex international events, actors and systems.

As a policy agency, we lead disability-inclusive development within Australia's aid program. We also contribute to Australia's policy on the human rights of people with disability. Our international counterparts have told us that

disability inclusion within DFAT lends more credibility to our policies and advocacy on international disability issues. In short, disability diversity makes us a more credible, persuasive advocate on the disability policy issues for which we are responsible.

As part of the Australian Public Service (APS), we meet our legal obligations (under the *Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, for example). We benefit from, and build on, the momentum created by the APS Commission's *As One: Making it Happen* strategy. The benefits of an inclusive APS have a 'ripple effect'. Providing an inclusive workplace helps improve workforce participation for people with disability, who currently have a lower participation rate in Australia's labour force than people without disability².

As an employer, we believe that disability diversity makes good business sense. We have a duty to use our resources—funded by Australian taxpayers—in the most efficient way. Disability diversity contributes to this. Independent studies have shown a strong correlation between workplace inclusion of employees with disability and increased productivity, reduced absenteeism, reduced turnover, increased morale, more positive organisational culture and reduced workers' compensation³.

DFAT's future workforce will benefit also. Considering the full range of potential staff enables us to access the broadest possible talent pool and range of skills, abilities and valuable new perspectives. Employing people with disability creates a culture of inclusion. This has many benefits, including reducing discrimination on the basis of race, age, sex, gender, sexual identity or responsibilities as a carer.



Lindy Judge, Marissa Bandharangshi, Felicity O'Brien, Matt Alexander and Lisa Mollard. DFAT Disability Network coordinators, past and present.

1. DFAT's Strategic Framework 2015–2019.

2. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2015), *Disability and Labour Force Participation, 2012: summary of findings* (cat. no. 4433.0.55.006).

3. See, for example, Australian Network on Disability, 'Business Benefits', accessed May 2016; and Diversity Council of Australia, 'Disability – Business case', accessed May 2016.

PROGRESS TO DATE

WE HAVE PERFORMED STRONGLY UNDER OUR 2011–2015 DISABILITY ACTION STRATEGY, WITH ACTIONS CONSIDERED INNOVATIVE FOUR YEARS AGO NOW EMBEDDED AS BUSINESS AS USUAL. WE HAVE MADE SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS, INCLUDING THROUGH THESE KEY ACHIEVEMENTS;



establishing a DFAT Disability Network with membership increasing steadily since it was founded in 2013;



instituting a regular opportunity for DFAT staff with disability to develop their international policy and representation skills by participating in the Australian delegation to the Conference of States Parties to the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;



implementing a reasonable adjustment policy to allow staff with disability to work safely and productively; and



appointment of an SES Band 2, currently the Chief People Officer, as an advocate to engage with and progress issues impacting our staff with disability.

SCHEDULE OF ACTIONS

Going forward, we remain committed to employing more people with disability, continuing to discuss disability issues and promoting a culture that shares information on disability and leverages the skills and abilities of our staff with disability. This includes through business-as-usual activities, immediate priorities, and future-focussed activities. It is important to ensure that locally engaged staff with disability are also beneficiaries of an increasingly inclusive work culture.

Business as usual

We will continue to expand the range of employment opportunities for people with disability by:

- continuing to use the expanded RecruitAbility scheme and the Australian Public Service disability employment affirmative measure;
- providing information on disability in Post Reports prepared by the department to provide staff considering posting with information about living conditions at its overseas posts;
- ensuring staff with disability can participate in mentoring and development programs (including the International Skills Development Program);
- ensuring contemporary learning platforms are accessible; and
- ensuring staff with disability are beneficiaries of our 'if not, why not' flexible work policy.

We will continue to promote an inclusive workplace culture by:

- remaining committed to the DFAT Disability Network;
- supporting the agenda of the Disability Champion;
- continuing to promote International Day of Persons with Disabilities;
- including staff Diversity Representatives on our Workplace Relations Committee;
- continuing our membership of the Australian Network on Disability, and accessing the 'disability confidence training' available through the membership;
- expanding our support for managers and staff to include Mental Health First Aid and unconscious bias training;
- examining the physical accessibility of our workplaces and leased premises and acting on identified issues;
- investing in the currency of our policies and website;
- working to improve our responsiveness to requests for reasonable adjustments; and
- harnessing opportunities to raise awareness of disability issues through our broader diversity agenda and by hosting public diplomacy events.

Immediate Priorities

In 2017, we will focus on becoming even more *disability positive*. By building disability confidence internally, we will increase our capacity to address barriers experienced by people with disability. Disability confidence will also better equip us to deliver on the *Development for All 2015–2020: Strategy for strengthening disability-inclusive development in Australia's aid program*.

We will also focus on attracting candidates with disability to apply for positions within DFAT.

We will undertake the following five actions to achieve this:



Action 1: develop relationships with education providers, including disability career advisors, and attend careers fairs and other events for students with disability.



Action 2: improve the careers section on the Internet so candidates with disability can readily locate information about the accessibility of DFAT programs, culture and workplaces.



Action 3: introduce disability awareness training for all recruitment panels, new recruits, people promoted to management positions and Workplace Diversity Contact Officers.



Action 4: work collaboratively with the DFAT Disability Network to develop tools so staff can access tailored disability information to assist staff with overseas posting considerations.



Action 5: improve access to assistive technologies across our information technology platforms, including pre-approval of site licenses.

IN ADDITION, WE WILL SUPPORT OUR STAFF WHO EXPERIENCE A MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION AS WELL AS PROMOTING A POSITIVE, PRODUCTIVE, MENTALLY HEALTHY WORKPLACE THROUGH PARTICIPATING IN *BEYONDBLUE'S* HEADS UP INITIATIVE AND IMPLEMENTING OUR FIRST MENTAL HEALTH POLICY.

FUTURE FOCUS

During 2018-2020, we will focus on enhancing a culture that invests in and harnesses the attributes of all staff. We will adjust our work environment to better manage mental health, disability and related issues so they are undertaken as routine business decisions in managing a high-performing workforce.

Each year we will refine specific goals and actions based on the goals and actions articulated below. These goals and actions will be formed through discussions between the DFAT Disability Network, the Disability Champion and the Mentoring, Performance and Diversity Section (MPS). Where appropriate, these will be reflected in the Performance and Development Agreements of MPS staff.

Future Goals and Actions

We will focus on:

- identifying and harnessing opportunities to support staff with progressive conditions, including mature-age workers with disability;
- reviewing our Reasonable Adjustment Policy; and
- advocating for improvement in the metric used to measure the prevalence of disability in the APS workforce.

We will pursue a genuine commitment to disability diversity. To advance our policy and advocacy capacity in international disability issues, we will:

- advocate for disability inclusive clauses in our aid contracts;
- examine the feasibility of collecting disaggregated aid program data by age, gender and disability;
- examine ways to improve disability inclusiveness in DFAT procurement;

- promote the inclusion of people with disability through public diplomacy opportunities;
- identify opportunities to mainstream disability inclusiveness across our services and the information we include in passports and consular assistance;
- continue to identify and address barriers faced by people with disability in accessing DFAT services; and
- introduce a mechanism for measuring satisfaction of our services as experienced by people with disability.



John Fisher, DFAT Disability Champion.

HOW WILL WE ENSURE PROGRESS?

We are responsible for promoting workplace diversity principles by upholding and promoting the APS Values and Code of Conduct, and are held accountable for this through various reporting mechanisms, including the:

- DFAT Annual Report to Parliament;
- APSC Annual State of the Service Report; and
- views of our staff with disability as reported in the APS Employee Census.

We will review progress against this Disability Action Strategy, including the number of staff who share their disability information, each year as part of our Annual Report to Parliament.

We will continue to participate in APS-wide initiatives and work in partnership with the APSC on disability initiatives.

Our Disability Champion will be a senior SES officer. Through this role, we will encourage and support our staff to develop and implement a culture of support for people with disability and to champion their inclusion.

Our DFAT Disability Network will continue to contribute to building our disability confidence by supporting, developing and retaining people with disability through awareness raising, mentoring, consulting and lobbying for change.

A key focus of the Mentoring, Performance and Diversity team in our Staff Welfare and Development Branch will be to develop solutions for staff with disability by offering centralised support for staff, their colleagues and managers.



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