

## At UN event, people with Downs Syndrome 'speak up' to influence government policy and action

21 March 2017 – Today, the call that people with Down Syndrome be included to fully and equally participate in all aspects of society echoed widely throughout United Nations Headquarters in New York.

With a full agenda, a special event to mark World Down Syndrome Day identified and turned key issues that affect individuals with Down syndrome into a call for inclusive policy making.

“What we need to see is a paradigm shift towards understanding that people with Down’s syndrome have valuable contributions to make to society and until that happens there are always going to be blockages to getting into school, to getting proper medical attention and living independently,” Andrew Boyd, Director Down’s Syndrome International, told *UN News*.

For many, prevailing negative attitudes result in low expectations, discrimination and exclusion – creating communities that prevent people with Down Syndrome from successfully integrating with others.

In contrast, the message reverberating from today’s event underscored that “when people with Down Syndrome and other disabilities are given opportunities to participate, all people benefit from this shared environment of friendship, acceptance and respect for everyone and high expectations are created.”

Those gathered for the event agreed that people with Down Syndrome and their advocates must be empowered to influence policy makers at all levels.

The speakers said that these individuals may need additional support in specific areas, such as health, education, work and living accommodations, which underscored the importance for them to directly influence policy formation and implementation covering those and other issues.

The resounding chorus of ‘My Voice, My Community’ encouraged people with Down syndrome and those who advocates for them to speak up, be heard and influence government policy and action.

The special event was organized by Down Syndrome International and sponsored by UN Permanent Missions, the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and international agencies and non-governmental organizations.