

Zero Conference: International Summit on Accessibility

Essl Foundation, World Future Council / Jakob von Uexkull and Bank Austria to bring 200 international politicians, NGO representatives, disabled persons and academics to Vienna to discuss selected laws and their most important aspects

On January 22 and 23, 2012 the International Conference on Good Policies for Persons with Disabilities will be taking place for the first time. It will bring together around 240 parliamentarians, NGO and foundation representatives, academics and activists from the rights for the disabled movement. It is being organised at the initiative of the Essl Foundation in cooperation with the Hamburg-based foundation, the World Future Council, and its founder Jakob von Uexkull, as well as by UniCredit Bank Austria.

The approach: an international think tank for accelerated implementation of the UN Convention

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities entered into force in May 2008. Upon acceding to the Convention, nations agree to report to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD Committee) on the current status of implementation within two years. Currently, however, the status from country to country varies considerably. For this reason, the initiators have decided to establish a leading independent think tank which carries out an extensive country comparison and identifies solutions in order to exert constructive international pressure in favour of accelerated implementation. It aims primarily at identifying positive examples as well as laws which have eliminated social, legal, economic, political and environmental barriers to the rights of persons with disabilities.

In January 2012, parliamentarians, NGO and foundation representatives, academics and representatives of the disability rights movement will meet for the first time to discuss these selected laws, particularly their successful aspects, in order to develop them further and to encourage their dissemination to other countries.

The Zero Conference: international summit at a glance

Eight policies have been selected by an advisory board to be discussed with 200 international decision-makers from the area of disability policy.

After introductory remarks by the conference's Honorary Patron H.R.H. Prince Ra'ad bin Zaid and initiators Jakob von Uexkull (World Future Council), Martin Essl (Essl Foundation) and Fred Luks (Sustainability Manager at Bank Austria), keynote speeches and plenary reports will follow by Hon Rudolf Hundstorfer (Federal Minister of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection), Johan ten Geuzendam (Head of Unit for Rights of Persons with Disabilities, European Commission), Elisabeth Schroedter MEP (Vice Chair of the European Parliament's Committee on Employment and Social Affairs), Lord Colin Low of Dalston CBE (Vice President of the Royal National Institute of Blind People and Member of the House of Lords) and Ioannis Vardakastanis (President of the European Disability Forum).

Afterwards, laws addressing some of the most urgent problems of persons with disabilities will be discussed:

- **Anti-discrimination protection, equality and universal access in Great Britain, Austria and Spain:** Legislation in these three countries either exhibits a comprehensive approach to disability equality or includes interesting aspects of protection against discrimination and for establishing accessibility.
- **Supported decision-making in British Columbia (Canada):** With its Representation Agreement Act, British Columbia has paved the way for recognition of the right to supported decision-making by means of personal planning tools, or so-called representation agreements.
- **The Right to Live Independently in Sweden:** The Act Concerning Support and Service to Persons with Certain Functional Impairments ensures persons with considerable disabilities appropriate living conditions with its provisions for ten special services, among them the right to personal assistance, which has established the foundation for a demand-oriented and competitive personal assistance market.
- **The right to inclusive education in Italy:** Italy has abolished nearly all special educational institutions. Its Framework Law for the Assistance, Social Integration and the rights of Disabled Persons establishes the rights of all pupils with special needs to a high-quality, inclusive education.
- **Access to justice in Israel:** Many justice systems throughout the world are inaccessible to persons with mental, intellectual or communicative impairments. The Israeli Investigation and Testimony Procedures Law stipulates that a special investigator assists in police interviews. It has also established significant accommodations for witness testimonies in court, including an exemption from cross-examination as a witness.
- **The Swedish personal ombudsperson:** Sweden has established a national system of personal ombudspersons, who assist with decision-making for persons with serious mental or psychosocial disabilities.

The Zero Project: establishment as long-term think tank

The aim of the Zero Project is, with regular publications, congresses and a website, to become established as a leading international think tank for the elimination of barriers in accordance with the UN Convention. In addition to the annually awarded Essl Social Prize, it is the Essl Foundation's second long-term project. The focus of the Zero Project website at www.zero-project.org, which will be officially launched at the conference in January 2012, are the Good Practices and Good Policies identified in the report. As an interactive platform for persons with disabilities, NGOs, policymakers, research and business, the page will facilitate a variety of forms of participation.

The organisers

The **Essl Foundation** was established in March 2008. It has been endowed with adequate financial resources to ensure the long-term presentation of the annual Essl Social Prize and support of other social activities, to provide support to persons in need, and to raise public awareness about the need for such support.

Press release

The **World Future Council** established by Jakob von Uexkull includes as many as 50 members from politics, the business world, civil society, academia and culture from all five continents. In close cooperation with civic groups, parliament members, academics and international organisations, the WFC conducts worldwide research on fair lawmaking and policy strategies for the future and advises political decision-makers in their implementation. The WFC is currently active in the areas of future justice, climate and energy, stable ecosystems, sustainable business, fair societies as well as peace and disarmament.

Bank Austria has been a member of UniCredit, one of the largest European bank groups, since 2005 and employs 10,900 people in 372 locations in Austria (including the subsidiaries of the UniCredit Group in Austria). In addition to sponsoring activities in the areas of culture, sustainability and sports, the bank's social contribution is reflected in its involvement with disadvantaged persons.

The following persons will also speak at the Zero Conference: Miguel Ángel Cabra de Luna (Co-chair of the European Consortium of Foundations and Human Rights and Disability and Member of the European Economic and Social Committee), Prof. Lisa Waddington (European Disability Forum Chair in European Disability Law at the University of Maastricht), Stefan Trömel (Director of the International Disability Alliance), Prof. Gerard Quinn (Director of the Centre for Disability Law and Policy at the National University of Ireland Galway School of Law), Prof. Antonio Luis Martínez-Pujalte López (Professor of Legal and Political Philosophy at the Miguel Hernandez University), as well as Javier Güemes (Director of the European Disability Forum).

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