

Press release

Canadian Law Distinguished at International Summit on Accessibility

Exemplary features of British Columbia's Law on supported decision-making to be discussed with 200 international politicians, NGO representatives, disabled persons and academics at the Zero Conference in Vienna

On January 22 and 23, 2012 the International Conference on Good Policies for Persons with Disabilities will be taking place for the first time in Vienna, Austria. It is part of the Zero Project – zero as in zero barriers – and will bring together around 250 parliamentarians, NGO and foundation representatives, academics and activists from the disability rights movement from all over the world in order to discuss exemplary laws, or features of them, and to encourage their further development and dissemination to other countries. The conference is being organised on the initiative of the Esst Foundation in cooperation with the World Future Council and its founder Jakob von Uexkull, as well as by UniCredit Bank Austria.

One of eight selected laws: the Representation Agreement Act of British Columbia

In 2000 British Columbia enacted the Representation Agreement Act RSBC c.405, thus leading internationally the way for recognition of the right to support in personal decision-making. The law's flexible definition of capability is one of its main strengths, since it recognises trust as one of the defining features of support relationships and shifts the burden of proof of incapability to others.

The legislation allows for the creation of personal planning tools known as representation agreements, which, unlike most personal planning tools, permit the appointment of an individual to help an adult make decisions. These representation agreements are praised by the disability community as highly successful in providing legal recognition of supported decision-making, significantly preventing guardianship. They are the reason why the number of private guardianships has remained fairly stable during the last years.

“The Representation Agreement Act enshrines new ways of understanding capability; it allows most importantly all adults to authorise personal supporters to assist them with decision-making as needed” explains Joanne Taylor, Executive Director of Nidus, British Columbia's centre of excellence in personal planning and supported decision-making.

The Representation Agreement Act will be presented at the Zero Conference in Vienna by Christine Gordon, Chairperson of Nidus as one of eight selected “Good Policies”.

The Zero Project: establishment as long-term think tank

The aim of the Zero Project is to become established as a leading international think tank for the elimination of barriers in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which entered into force in May 2008. This is to be achieved by regular publication of a novel international comparative study, the so-called Zero Report, congresses like the current Zero Conference and a comprehensive website.

The Zero Project website at <http://www.zeroproject.org> will be officially launched at the conference in January 2012 and will have a focus on the Good Practices and Good Policies identified in the current Zero 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, such as the Zero Project. Its main goals are to provide support to persons in need, and to raise public awareness about the need for such support.

The **World Future Council** established by Jakob von Uexkull, consists of 50 respected personalities from all five continents. They represent governments, parliaments, the arts, civil society, science and the business world. The WFC conducts worldwide research on future just policies and legislation, advises political decision-makers, offers them tried and tested courses of action and supports them in the concrete implementation of new policies. The WFC is currently active in the areas of Future Justice, Climate and Energy, Sustainable Ecosystems, Sustainable Economies, Just 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.

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