

**Address by the Minister of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance  
Mrs Zeta Emilianidou, at the Conference organised by the Ministry of  
Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance and the Council of Europe entitled:  
"Human Rights: A Reality for All"**

**27 March 2017, Filoxenia Conference Center**

Mr. Commissioner of the Council of Europe for Human Rights,  
Deputy Ministers,  
Representatives of Council of Europe Member States,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to Cyprus and to this Conference. Truly, it is a great honour for Cyprus to host today's Conference entitled "Human Rights: A Reality for All- Council of Europe Disability Strategy 2017-2023". In particular, I would like to express my warmest thanks to all those who contributed to the organisation of this Conference.

We hope that the new Council of Europe Disability Strategy 2017 - 2023, the implementation of which we are launching in Nicosia today, will inspire you, and give you additional knowledge and insight, new ideas and high-reaching goals that you will convey to your countries and pass down to all those involved and interested in disability issues. We expect and hope that the new strategy, the Nicosia Strategy, will become, as from this day, a new reference document, a new milestone in the history of the activities of the Council of Europe, a new catalyst for additional measures and actions strengthening and supporting all Europeans with disabilities.

The issues facing persons with disabilities are very high on the list of priorities of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus, and the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance. The Republic of Cyprus, as a Member of the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the European Union, views the rights of persons with disabilities as fundamental human rights and guarantees them through the international conventions it has ratified, the pinnacle of which is the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which Cyprus ratified in 2011.

Despite the severe economic crisis we have lived through the last few years, our efforts were constantly focused on the welfare of persons with disabilities. The policies, measures, programs and the actions we implement aim at strengthening and supporting people with disabilities so that they may live with maximum autonomy, as equal members of society.

At the same time our goal is to cultivate the attitudes, beliefs and values that will ensure that disability is accepted, respected and recognized as part of human diversity and this is because only in a society where diversity is viewed and considered to be an opportunity, and where integrity as a concept is broadened to embrace an ever larger part of the population, the virtue and value of each person is highlighted and the uniqueness of each experience results in upgrading civilization itself.

It is within this framework that the Council of Europe Disability Strategy 2017 – 2023 has been shaped, guided by a rights-based approach and based on fundamental freedoms, namely independence, freedom of choice, full inclusivity, equality and human dignity. The emphasis given on cross-cutting principles underlying the Strategy, clearly illuminates the directions in which we should be moving and the actions we must take. In the context of the implementation of the Strategy, every action must be taken in line with the principles of inclusivity, cooperation and coordination, of Universal Design and reasonable adjustments, gender equality and combating multiple discriminations. These principles are often taken for granted and as self-evident, however, we must remember that often what is taken for granted and as being common, is exactly what is at more risk of being ignored. In this light, the Council of Europe Disability Strategy should become a safety net for persons with disabilities, but also for those in decision-making positions and in the provision of services, in order to make fair and informed choices.

During these two days we will have the opportunity to thoroughly discuss the five priority areas of the strategy, namely: Equality and Non-discrimination, Awareness Raising, Accessibility, Equal Recognition before the Law and Freedom from Exploitation, Violence and Abuse.

Inevitably, the road leading to the realization of human rights for all is a long one and often becomes tortuous. What is important is to recognize both our positive actions and results, and our weaknesses so that, in cooperation and in a constructive spirit, we may move forward.

We eagerly await to listen to the prominent speakers will say and look forward to the exchange of knowledge, ideas and experience among participants. I am sure that the deliberations of our two-day Conference will be productive and beneficial for all participants and I wish you all a pleasant stay in Cyprus.