

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY

2 April 2009

By designating 2 April as World Autism Awareness Day, the United Nations General Assembly has helped to galvanize international efforts to promote greater understanding about autism. This year's observance is being marked with lectures, briefings, screenings, musical performances, video conferences, art installations and other activities carried out by the UN family and a full constellation of partners.

I welcome this growing international chorus of voices calling for action to enable children and persons with autism to lead full and meaningful lives. This is not a far-off dream; it is a reality that can be attained by promoting positive perceptions about autism as well as a greater social understanding of this growing challenge.

I have seen what caring people who work tirelessly for this goal can achieve. Last year, the United Nations hosted a rock concert by Rudely Interrupted, whose members have various disabilities, including on the autism spectrum. They brought the audience to its feet with warm, communicative songs and showed, through the sheer joy of their performance, how much people with disabilities can offer the world.

The words of lead singer Rory Burnside were especially inspiring. "My advice", he said, "to kids who have some form of disability is: don't let it stop you. Use it as your strength; don't use it as your weakness. One red light can lead to a whole bunch of green lights, with a few orange lights thrown in. And the red lights are just a bit of a test. There are definitely more green and orange".

On World Autism Awareness Day, let us capture and share this spirit, and let us intensify global efforts to ensure that children and persons with autism everywhere can benefit from the supportive environment they need to reach their full potential and contribute to society.