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European Days of Autism 2011: A call to governments to stop forcing the most vulnerable people to bear the cost of the ongoing financial crisis

During the 'European Days of Autism' to be held throughout Europe this October, the European Union and national governments are being called upon to fulfill their recent commitments to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

Amidst the recent budget cuts and austerity measures being implemented in many European countries, people with Autism Spectrum Disorders have seen significant cuts to the basic services they depend on for housing, health and education.

In Italy, for example, €10 billion in funding will be cut in 2012-2013 from the regional and local health and social services. These cuts include the cancellation of the 'National fund for persons with dependency needs', which will deprive of all forms of assistance to 20% of persons with disabilities living in the north of the country, 30% living in the centre and 50% living in the south, from 2012 onwardsⁱ.

Similarly, a proposed 20 percent cut to the projected spend for the United Kingdom's 'Disability Living Allowance' payments under the Welfare Reform Billⁱⁱ would mean over 700,000 people with disabilities could have their living support payments cut or cancelledⁱⁱⁱ.

These cuts will leave many people who have Autism unable to meet some of the everyday needs for which they usually rely on a range of health and social services.

These cuts are in direct contradiction to the pledges made by the European Union and its members when ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in December 2010, almost one year ago.

Italy and the United Kingdom are just examples. Autism-Europe's President, Evelyne Friedel, explains: "We are seeing these funding cuts across many European countries."

"Providing support to people with disabilities is a human right – the governments of Europe have confirmed that when they signed the Convention.

"It's not acceptable to put the rights of people with disabilities aside when financial difficulties arise," Ms Friedel continues.

"Governments and the European Union institutions must ensure that their commitments under the UNCRPD are fulfilled and that persons with Autism Spectrum Disorders benefit from the same opportunities as the rest of Europe's citizens," urges Ms Friedel.

'European Days of Autism' have been held annually since 2007 to raise awareness about Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) and issues faced by people who have ASDs.

For more information, and or interviews, please do not hesitate to contact Aurelie Baranger, Director of Autism-Europe, in Brussels: Tel: +32 (0)2 675 75 05 Email: aurelie.baranger@autismeurope.org

'European Days of Autism' events and activities will be held throughout Europe this October. Please see the websites of Autism-Europe members for details: www.autismeurope.org/about-us/our-members/

ⁱ European Disability Forum, 2011, *Letter to the President of Italy*, http://www.edf-feph.org/Page_Generale.asp?DocID=13854&thebloc=13856

ⁱⁱ UK Parliament, *Welfare Reform Bill 2010-2011*, <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2010-11/welfare-reform.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ Disability Alliance, 2011, *Hardest Hit Campaign*, <http://www.disabilityalliance.org/hardesthit.htm>