

# Helsinki Commission Hearing on Care for the Disabled in Romania September 13, 2006

## Statement of Senator Sam Brownback Chairman

We have convened this hearing to examine the state of care for the disabled in Romania. By way of introduction to that subject, I'd like to make a few observations.

First, in 1991, the OSCE participating States specifically committed to protect the human rights of persons with disabilities. At the same time, Congress took steps to ensure that the annual country reports on human rights, prepared by the Department of State, would include information about the treatment of disabled persons. More recently, Congress allocated funds in the 2005 Appropriations Act for programs and activities to address the needs and protect the rights of people with disabilities in developing countries.

In other words, the rights of disabled people are an important part of our human rights and our foreign policy dialogue with other nations. It is a measure of society how we treat the most disadvantaged among us.

Earlier this year, Mental Disability Rights International issued a report that was saddening and, in some ways, shocking, for the image it portrayed of neglect and abuse of the disabled in Romania. Today's hearing will allow us to hear more about that report and the findings of its principal author. We will also hear from Motivation Romania, a non-governmental organization working on-the-ground in Romania providing services to disabled adults and children. A representative of the Romanian Government will also share with us his government's perspectives on the challenges of meeting needs and protecting the rights of its disabled citizens.

*[Opening statements from any other Commissioners]*

## Witness Introductions

We are very fortunate to be joined today by **ADRIAN MINDROIU**, Director for European Integration in the National Authority for Persons with Disabilities. Mr. Mindroi has flown in from Bucharest to participate in this hearing, and we are grateful that you were able to come to Washington to share with us your expertise.

Also testifying is **CRISTIAN ISPAS**, the Executive Director of Motivation Romania and National Director of the Special Olympics Romania Foundation. Mr. Ispas has worked for 13 years to provide programs and support to wheelchair users, and he has also come from Romania

to participate in this hearing. Mr. Ispas, we welcome hearing your views, based on your first-hand experiences working with disabled populations in Romania.

Finally, we welcome **ERIC ROSENTHAL**, the Executive Director of Mental Disability Rights International, an advocacy organization dedicated to the international recognition and enforcement of the rights of people with mental disabilities. Mr. Rosethnal has worked with this organization since 1993 and conducted monitoring missions in numerous OSCE countries.