

Chairperson,

Distinguished guests

Ladies & Gentlemen,

It is a great honor and pleasure to be at this celebration of the 7<sup>th</sup> World Down Syndrome Day. South Africa will be a host of the World Down Syndrome Congress, where thousands of people with Down syndrome, their families and related professionals and care givers will gather to meet from all over the world. Experience South Africa, its warmth, its possibilities its ability to turn ordinary into extraordinary. South Africa inspires new ways of doing and thinking. It will be an unforgettable experience!

Tomorrow, 21 March 2012 marks the 7th anniversary of World Down Syndrome Day and for the first time in 2012 this day will be officially observed by the United Nations. This is a tremendous achievement for this movement which spans all continents. Down Syndrome unlike other genetic conditions affects every race, every economic level and every country. The recognition by the United Nations must be celebrated.

It did not come easily! It came through the tears of many parents who had to learn quickly to change their paradigm about what a perfect child was. It came through broken hearts of millions of children around the world who have suffered rejection because they look different. It came through the struggle for millions of parents around the world to overcome their guilt and shame forced upon them by societies that refuse to accept each person for the gift God made them to be.

But despite their challenges, kids with Down syndrome can go to regular schools, make friends, enjoy life, and get jobs when they're older. Getting special help early — often when they are just babies and toddlers is the key to healthier, happier, more independent lives.

These amazing human beings who teach us everyday that there is much more to life than intelligence, beauty and "perfection." They teach us that not everything can be measured in dollars and cents.

World Down Syndrome Day is an extraordinary opportunity to reshape the way we look at the world. In closing, in her book *A Return to Love...* Marianne Williamson says; Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you *not* to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.'

I thank you!