

Presentation by Mokrane Boussaid,
Director of the European Blind Union,
at the Stakeholder Conference on Accessible Tourism
Thursday 18th of January 2007
“Accessibility in Transport”

Good morning ladies and gentlemen,

My name is Mokrane Boussaid. I am the director of the European Blind Union (EBU) and here as a representative of the European Disability Forum, of which EBU is a full member.

The European Disability Forum will celebrate its tenth anniversary this year and is the representative organisation of, and not for, disabled people in the European Union. It was set up by disabled people and their families to promote their rights in all strands of EU policy. This gives disabled people the possibility to speak with one single and independent voice. EDF reflects the wide diversity of the disability movement and covers not only people with physical impairments but also people with sensory impairments, people with intellectual disabilities, mental health problems or chronic illnesses.

Full access to transport is an essential requirement in order for disabled people to enjoy full citizenship. Access to transport is also a prerequisite to the full enjoyment of tourism. Without accessible transport, disabled people cannot go on holiday. Being able to travel and to access tourist activities is indispensable for disabled people to achieve social inclusion.

This is why EDF welcomes this conference, where different stakeholders meet to discuss access to transport and access to tourism.

EDF experience regarding transport accessibility is that things are certainly evolving, but not quickly nor comprehensively enough. Some groups of disabled people are often forgotten when making transport accessible. Accessibility is often interpreted in a limitative way to mean access for wheelchair users only, thus ruling out the access needs of other groups of people with disabilities – e.g people with sensory impairments or with intellectual disabilities. The latter groups have accessibility needs of their own and these must be acknowledged and taken on board all processes to make modes of transport accessible.

I should also like to point out that the disability movement considers it more adequate to refer to design for all rather than to accessibility. We need to move towards the Design for All concept, which means that goods and services must be accessible and useable by the greatest numbers, and that special adaptations should only be resorted to in case no other solutions are found. What is more, implementing special solutions for specific groups of users often proves more expensive than designing services and products that can be accessed and used by all.

Travel accessible to people with disabilities often results in travel that is more comfortable to all, disabled and non disabled alike - people with heavy luggage, older people, pregnant women, parents with buggies, etc. Accessible travel is also quality travel for all and therefore does attract more passengers, including non-disabled passengers.

Accessible transport does not only mean an accessible

vehicle or rolling stock. For EDF, accessibility requires a holistic approach including providing information in accessible formats and making information about the accessibility of a journey available. Infrastructure and facilities at rail stations, bus stops, ports and airports also need to be accessible. Ideally, it shouldn't be more complicated to travel as a disabled person than as a non-disabled person, but the situation today leaves much to be desired, in particular as regards accessible information and information on accessible travelling. For example, booking websites are often inaccessible to people with visual impairment and there is a general lack of information about the level of accessibility on board various modes of transport. Without accessible information and reliable information on the accessibility of a journey, a disabled person might not feel confident to travel. What EDF wishes to see in the future is seamless travel from point of departure to point of arrival.

In this respect, EDF promotes disability awareness training for staff in the transport sector. The absence of such training often entails attitudinal barriers. Lack of knowledge and preassumptions about disability can lead to unprofessional and even degrading treatment of a disabled passenger.

Let me mention one last basic point which is all too often forgotten : consult with disabled people's organizations, like our own, when taking steps to make modes of transport more accessible. We disabled people are the ones who know best about our needs. We must be consulted upstream, that is at a very early stage, to make sure new accessibility measures are of real value to us.

I should like to thank the European Commission for organizing this conference and giving us the opportunity to

exchange on the very important topic of access to tourism. I am of course in your hands for any questions you may have.