

Interview with Liisa Kauppinen about the UN Convention

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Introduce: Here is Liisa Kauppinen, former president of WFD, and now honoured president. Her interest is to fight for equality for the deaf populace. Now I want to interview her about something very interesting; the UN convention.

Jaro: Can you explain what the UN is, and how the progress goes on in the UN?

Liisa: Yes, thank you. The UN is an organisation of governments, and the countries cooperate as members in the UN. The members are parted in three groups; A, B and C. Group A is for government only, and has veto power and responsibility for vocations in the UN. The second group, B, consists of organisations such as WFD. The function of this group is more likely instructing. This will say that we have contact with UN, such as meetings of which we exchange information, help, support and more with the UN. We do not have any voting authority.

Jaro: Ok. Can you give a description about the UN Convention?

Liisa: The UN has an assortment of conventions, as for instance the Human Rights Convention and the subsidiary Convention of Children's Rights. But it has recently been recognized a convention for Disabled people's Rights. This convention's power is as strong as the Human Rights Convention and other agreements. It might persuade the governments to accept the contract and concede it in their constitution or law. The source to this prospect is that the tie between a convention and a national constitution is strong.

Jaro: Yes. This link of law and convention is important. But is it also important for us deaf, and can you possibly clarify why it is so significant?

Liisa: Yes. The reason is that each UN Convention has different connotation, reliant on which situation that is current. One instance is Sign Language. If a government acknowledges Sign Language into their constitution, then they might encourage a promoting of Sign Language, research of Sign Language, education of deaf children and hearing families with deaf children. When the acknowledgement is done, the government's duty will therefore follow what it has accepted from the charter. They can subsequently not be able to ignore Sign Language anymore. Once the government has acknowledged Sign language, they must follow the convention. But if they do not accept sign language, and nor admit the convention neither, it follows that they can reject Sign Language rights.

Jaro: Yes, it is indeed important for us who are deaf. But imagine if an UN convention is given to a government. What which happen next, is that they are delaying the work about getting the charter into the law. How can we endorse the government to accelerate their recognition of the convention?

Liisa: This can we do by several ways, as getting in touch with parties or organisations such as federations of disability, teacher and et cetera. If we have connections to many people or organisations of whom can affect the government, then they will see us. After having seen us, we can get a debate with them, and it can lead us to the parliament.

When we finally are there, then we can not be ignored because the parliament has to listen to our demands as voting public of their administration. We can present our problems for the parliament as a last expedient, after that the government has rejected us. We deaf must have several supporters behind our demands, or else we will never be listened. The more numerous we are makes us stronger!

Jaro: Yes, numerous groups of handicaps gathered together would make us stronger, which are true. Now I would like to ask you to recount us some of your rich experience from the UN meetings of which you always have attended with exceptionally low loss of appear. It might be of particular interest for the member and the other who don't know about the UN and how the meetings occur.

Liisa: Well, let's me see. First I want to say that the majority do not know about Sign Language. They have wrong ideas about Sign Language, such as the idea that Sign language is a supporter to speaking language only. Because of their lack of knowledge I have to argue against their conviction again over again, and I usually advise them to read about language at www.ethologue.com. The site has 6.000 speaking languages, and 120 Sign Languages. The reaction is commonly a surprise of which sources in that they did not know that there exist such a diversity of languages. What consistently comes thereafter is the argument about that sign language is not a language because it does not have any written grammar structure. To this I come back with that out of 6000 there are 1000 languages with textual grammar, and 5000 without any written language.

Another example is that they usually think that it is better to have one international Sign Language instead of a variety of tongues, just as the blind people of whom has only one language; the Braille system. Then I respond that the Braille system is accommodated into the English, German and other languages, and therefore dependent on which language the blind individual is talking. Sign Language is independent of the written language. But here they would ask why we could not have one global Sign Language instead of several ones? After getting this question, I ask them back why they have different languages when they could as well have one common language. This is an almost continuously discussion, and it is a considerable work to make them understand why we fight for Sign Language.

The governments are in general unconvinced of the reason to our demands for getting Sign Language acknowledged by the constitution, or the law. To this I justify that in the history and still today, there existed and do exist situation of which deaf children became oppressed to not use signs by the authorities of the school. As a result of the repression the children got problems with the communication, and the learning was leisurely. After having enlightened them about that, the governments is usually astonished that it did happen, and do still happen with deaf children.

The reason to that the governments is hesitant to acknowledge our language, is economy. They think that if they accept Sign Language into their constitution or law, then the consequence will be that they have to spend more moneys. An example on this is that one man said that he would discount the demand about making Sign Language as equal as the speaking language. I asked him then why he had problems with the demand and if he regarded Sign Language as a language. His respond was that he did accept our tongue as a language, but that the parliament already had twenty interpreters only for the hearings. This was the reason to that he did not like the idea of twenty more interpreters for the deaf. After listening to this, I asked him if there were 20 deaf persons in the parliament, and he agreed that it was not that many deaf delegates there. I told him that it would not be like that in the present, but it might happen in the future. Currently the parliament has one deaf person included, and therefore only one interpreter is needed.

At last he understood, and accepted the requirement. I have worked on this in five years, and I know him very well now. If a new representative replaced him, it would result in that I have to start to argue anew - this provides how hard my job is!

An last example of which gave me pleasure; at the 8th meeting there were 120 delegates from various governments. The UN convention was finished and acknowledged by the president in this time, and this was being watched by 800 deaf persons. The statement was highly celebrated by the numerous spectators! It filled me with satisfying amazement, and I felt so happy.

Jaro: We have to thank Liisa for her relentlessly work in long time until now for securing our future, and making our and our children's life circumstances better! Thank you so much for taking up your time to this interview!

Liisa: Thank you!