

Interview with Markku Jokinen

Frontrunn3rs – <http://fr3.frontrunners.dk>

Katarína: Hello, I welcome Markku, the President of World Federation of the Deaf (WFD). I want to ask him some questions. The first question is, as the WFD was established in 1951 and still going 'til now 2007. And you are the President for 4 years now. So do you have any aims for the future, were the aims same as before or different?

Markku: That's good questions, as you know that every four years there are list of aims and work to be done. Every four years there is WFD General Assembly (GA) not the Congress, but in the GA there are delegates from each association in their countries. In these GA meeting we approve of the next 4 years aims. In the last 4 years, the last GA meeting at Montreal in 2003, where we approved for the 4 years plan and work. Now the most recently in July which was at Madrid and again the GA approved of the next 4 years plan up to 2011. The difference or the similarity between the two GA meetings in Montreal and Madrid is a very good question. As I was elected to be the President at Montreal, Canada in 2003, we came up with long list of aims and plans for the 4 years work. However after the one to two years, the WFD faced a financial problem. I was dismayed also by the fact that our General Secretariat has step down. So the work we have done within that 4 years from 2003 to 2007 was less than originally planned, the list that we focused on is the UN Convention, this got started around the same time of this 4 year plan, focused on Sign Language and interpreters, and many more to be included in the Convention. During those 4 years, we dedicated most of our time on the UN Convention.

The second plan work in the last 4 years was to contact all the OMs (Ordinary Members) and spread the information and give our partnership supports to the OMs.

Also the third work was to create stronger foundation of the WFD regional offices despite the financial problems which the solutions were created and the WFD was on its way up. All that happened within the 4 years.

At Madrid, the financial situation was okay, the future seems good and the Sign Language was included in the UN Convention. This means that the next 4 years will have different aims and plan of work. On my list there are some interesting points to give; the first one is related to the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, we are trying to push countries to sign the Convention also encouraging the Deaf Association in the country to discuss with their government to push the government to sign the Convention, once signed and changing their constitution. The WFD cannot deal directly to the government so we must go through the deaf associations, the OM and within the OM give training and practical materials, guidelines booklets so these OM can know enough about the Convention in order to discuss it with their government. This is the priority at the moment.

Secondly our WFD office is in the need of increasing in financial gaining, employing more people, we hope to have 8 employers by 2011 and appointing a Youth Development Officer to be responsible for the youth section. We hope to achieve this by then. Also this is linked to increasing the information and making all of the regions in the world to work together and become stronger.

Thirdly I hope that Deaf people from all over the world will learn and know of Human Rights and maybe set up a Sign Language department within the WFD, and have some

people in this to work to promote Sign Languages. These three areas are our aims for the next 4 years.

Katarína: As you said about the OM, the Deaf Associations as they must campaign for Sign Languages and Human Rights but is there any other areas that these associations must not forget to work for?

Markku: Each of these deaf associations has a range of aims to work on, I believe that there are number of priorities, the most important of all is putting Sign Language onto the government law, and by this it will raise the status of Sign Language. This will enable research and studies into Sign Language at university levels and many more. This is closely linked to interpreters then the rest of the aims vary from Human Rights, services and participations and many more to be solved. Without the recognition of Sign Language onto the law these other areas will be much harder to be worked on. Sign Language not recognised, Deaf people will fall behind. Sign Language is the key. Raising the status of Sign Language will solve other problem areas.

Katarína: As you know that there are some problems across the world relating to deaf, are you able to tell how the lives of the deaf people were regarding to education, work and social etc.

Markku: Yes, in the world, all deaf people are different; there are roughly about 2 or 3 different groups. The largest deaf group is in the Southern Hemisphere meaning the Developing Countries, the majority of deaf people live in developing countries. There are few deaf people living in developed countries. The education is lower in developing countries; many deaf are not able to receive any form of education, only a few percentages of them goes to school and many are waiting. This means that many of deaf people do not have the chance to learn Sign Language. These deaf people are not able to obtain work as result of no education. Many hearing people oppressed these deaf people by being isolated but in the deaf group, women are being oppressed even more, deaf men/boys are slightly better off than deaf women/girls. We must not forget these women and girls as there is a vicious circle of when women are being oppressed, this caused by lack of education and this affecting the women family and illness in children. By equalising deaf women with deaf men, the status of deaf people can rise. Deaf men itself is not enough to raise the status for deaf people. In developing countries, many deaf people do not have any work or education. In some parts of Africa, about 80 to 95% of deaf people do not receive any education; this also applies to some areas in South America as well as a large percentage in Asia.

In Europe, Japan, Australia, America and Canada, there are still some problems like the prohibition for the use of Sign Language and this is happening towards to people with cochlear implants; these are relatively new problems whereas Oralism has been going on for a long time. In some countries like Sweden where they allows the use of Sign Language for the cochlear implants users, this only exist in very tiny percentage in the world, which is actually a big problem. The widespread of cochlear implants causes unsure of their deaf identity, this is another example of a problem nowadays, so therefore the deaf associations have the responsibilities of finding these identity lost deaf people and support them.

In the future, as I has said it before which has caused some shock that deaf people in Africa becomes strong due to no cochlear implants may help deaf people with problems in Europe and America to educate them, a reverse roles!

Katarína: Last question, what do you think of the Frontrunners?

Markku: Frontrunners- this particular group, the fourth... no, it's third group actually. I have met the first group before, and met very few participants in the second Frontrunners. Now Frontrunners 3, I have met them all here at Castberggård, where we the board of WFD and the youths, WFDYS had our board meetings here and in that time we have gotten to know to the Frontrunners participants. What I thought it was good is that the group is international as many of them comes from all over the world, also all have different cultures and made some impacts in order to learn from each other. The culture difference causing some conflict which in fact is good to help the people to see from more different perspectives. Sticking to one same culture, experiencing the same sign language and meeting the same people over and over again will not help you to gain different perspectives; this can cause some difficulties in the future. Refusing to accept other cultures, believing on my own way will make conflicts and disagreements. Sharing many differences will help to open each other's minds and that is very important for changes in the international world. Experiences gain now will help for the future, whereas no exchanges between people will create barriers in the future and neglecting other people. Secondly stepping out of home country to a new place is big contrast from the life they are used at their own home countries, learning many new things that they can bring back to their countries and make some active changes that the country don't have.

Thirdly as you know that a section of deaf people in the world meets other international deaf people, as this has been always the case for many decades. Youth nowadays have internet and emails, and this course help for more interlinking bond between deaf people, encouraging these deaf people to have double identities for example an Italian person having an Italian and International identities. There are many more positive things; I really praise this course Frontrunners.