

The convention on the rights of persons with disabilities' why what and where?

Dear friends,

During ages persons with disabilities' so also deafblind persons' always have been considered as not full functioning' as not being able to represent themselves' especially in legal matters' yes even as persons with a defect' that should be repaired. National laws and international conventions have not changed that attitude yet. It was necessary to finally make: a more disability specific convention. Since the adoption of a resolution of the un General Assembly in 2001 to prepare this convention, intensive negotiations have been taken place between all Un member states. Remarkable is the growing influence of international and national disability organizations themselves, united in the International Disability Caucus, Idc. I have been chairing the steering committee of the Idc many times and have been involved in the negotiations on a daily basis during the last four years.

This convention is an international legal document. States that ratify this convention' give themselves the obligation to obey this law. It will bring, as it was often called, a total "paradigm shift" in the attitude towards all persons with disabilities. It considers persons with disabilities as full participants in society and moves disability issues from social issues into human rights issues. Equality before and under the law is a general principle in this convention.

We, deafblind persons in all stages of life, are also involved. We will get the right to individual autonomy, including the right to make our own decisions.

It will not be the state or social authorities anymore' that decide which technical aids or personal assistants are best for us. States oblige themselves to what is called "reasonable accommodation" to be able to live' to work' to get education and that includes the assistance we need.

We will have legal capacity, that means we can own properties' sign documents' make choices about medical treatment' if.ex. if we want cochlear implant or not. Respect for the dignity of the person and our privacy is there also' and that means: no inhuman or degrading

treatment and no (sexual or other=abuse or exploitation, accessibility rights' including access to information and information technology. We will have the right to an adequate standard of living, access to justice, employment and self-employment, to be political active and also to marry and have children' education and life-long-learning' to travel and to live where and with whom we want' to health and rehabilitation.

The convention has 50 articles and covers all areas of life. I can not mention everything here' but important for us deafblind people is: that everywhere the convention talks about means and modes of communication' tactile communication is included' also as a recognized way of expressing ourselves. Sign languages are for the first time internationally recognized as languages. Deafblind children are explicitly mentioned' having the right to get education in environments which maximize academic and social development. That can be interpreted as "in their own settings". Deafblindness is mentioned in this convention' although nobody wanted to mention specific disabilities. I hope that will help to get deafblindness recognized.

After the adoption by the UN General Assembly, hopefully in November-December the process of ratification by individual or groups of states begins. After 20 states have ratified the convention, it will go into power. This will take time, because states have to change national laws first, before ratifying, unless they have made reservations. An international committee of experts with disabilities will follow the implementation of the convention. Also on a national level such mechanisms will be put in place. Everyone will have the right to complain to a national or international committee in case human rights of deafblind people are violated. Because national laws changed according to this convention' we can also go to court if necessary.

The Idc is already producing interpretation materials and I am prepared to develop education material for deafblind people. Thank you for your attention.

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