

Mittler, 16 June. Session 2.5.

THINK GLOBAL - ACT LOCAL

HISTORY

I have three things to say to you about History.

History happens every day

The first is that History is not just about what happened long ago. History is also about what happens today and every day

2010: The Most Important Year in the history of Inclusion International

The second thing I want to say is this: 2010 is the most important year in the whole 50 years of the history of Inclusion International.

So all of us in this room and in this world congress are making history right now.

Why? Because we now have our new United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

It really is OUR Convention. That is why we are talking about it at our conference this week.

And when Inclusion International is 100 years old?

Third, we should think about the people who will come together to celebrate the 100th birthday of Inclusion International 50 years from now. I hope some of the younger people attending this conference will be there. People will be asking them whether we did all we could in 2010 to use the new Convention to make a big difference to the rights of people with disabilities in every country in the world.

History is Watching Us!

THE UNITED NATIONS

What I would like to do this afternoon is to say a little about the long road that we have travelled to achieve this great Convention.

So I will begin by saying something about the United Nations.

Everybody knows that the UN works very hard to prevent people fighting and killing one another. Sometimes it succeeds but often it fails. But the UN is also concerned with the day to day lives of ordinary people. Part of that work has to do with protecting the basic human rights of all of us.

The United Nations has always been a friend of disabled people

The United Nations have worked very hard to try to encourage governments to take more notice of people with disabilities: to support them in

going to school, getting work and living like other people in their own communities, not in institutions.

That is why the leaders of Inclusion International have always worked very closely with all the different parts of the United Nations, especially those dealing with children and families, health and work and leisure.

OUR LEADERS

Inclusion International has always been lucky to have leaders who understood how important it is to work with the United Nations.

Diane Richler, Klaus Lachwitz, Robert Martin

Today, we can thank Diane Richler, Klaus Lachwitz and Robert Martin for the many years in which they have worked to bring us our new United Nations Convention.

But it has been a very long road to the Convention. So I want to mention some of our leaders who laid the foundation stones and showed us the way.

Yvonne Posternak

One of our first Presidents was Yvonne Posternak. Because she lived in Geneva, she could easily visit the head offices of the World Health Organisation, the International Labour Organisation and several other big United Nations

agencies.

Donald Beasley

When Donald Beasley became President, he worked hard to make sure that Inclusion International was recognised by all the big United Nations Organisations: the World Health Organisation, the International Labour Organisation and UNESCO which is mainly concerned with inclusive education and has worked very closely with us.

Gunnar and Rosemary Dybwad

Another President, Gunnar Dybwad and his wife Rosemary who had also lived in Geneva for several years and worked with a big organisation for children. They will always be remembered for their support to the world-wide movement for self-advocacy.

Eloisa da Lorenzo

A later President was Eloisa da Lorenzo who was head of the largest children's organisation in South America. From that base she was also a world leader for children with intellectual disabilities. She was one of the first to show that small babies with Down Syndrome could be helped to learn if the right teaching methods were used.

Walter Eigner

A lot of the United Nations meetings were held in Vienna. So we were

often joined by Walter Eigner, head of Lebenshilfe Vienna, as well as Treasurer and later President of Inclusion International. Walter has always been a great fighter for inclusive education.

OUR FRIENDS

Inclusion International had some wonderful friends on the long journey to the Convention.

The other disability organisations

First and foremost, there were all the organisations speaking for other groups of disabled people – Disabled Peoples International, the World Blind Union, the World Federation for the Deaf, Rehabilitation International and many others.

Of course, the different disability groups did not always agree with one another: for example, on the right of children with disabilities to go to ordinary schools. But we all knew we had to work together and speak with a single voice on human rights for disabled people and their families.

Mainstream groups

One of the lessons which the disability movement as a whole has learned from history is how much we have in common with mainstream organisations speaking for much larger groups, such as all children, all people living in poverty.

Don't Forget US!

But some of these big organisations sometimes forget about disabled people. For example, we know that disabled people all over the world are the 'poorest of the poor'; also, that they are often unable to go to school or to get a job and that they often have poor health and bad living conditions.

So Inclusion International sometimes has to remind these groups that disabled people *must* be included in all the big world programmes that work to reduce poverty, improve health and ensure that all children everywhere can go to school.

Even the UN sometimes forgets the needs of disabled women and children, as well as disabled refugees and victims of war.

So the United Nations works at two levels. The first level concerns every one in the world or very large groups such as all women or all children. The second level focuses much more sharply on the needs of disabled people.

THE ROAD TO THE CONVENTION

I said that our Convention is a big landmark on a long road. That road began in 1968 when our world congress was held in Jerusalem.

1968- 1971 UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons with Mental

Retardation

That congress agreed the world's first Declaration on the Rights of Persons with Mental Retardation – the term we used then.

Our French member society UNAPEI then had the brilliant idea of persuading the French government to make a proposal to the United Nations that the Declaration should be adopted by the UN as a world-wide statement. In December 1971, the UN accepted that proposal. That was a great beginning.

Back in the 1970s, the leaders of Inclusion International did their very best to help member societies to use the Declaration in their own countries. They produced a very helpful document called *Step by Step*. This document suggested what changes should happen to make a reality of each of the seven articles of that Declaration in each country.

1981 The UN International Year of Disabled Persons 1981

The UN declared that 1981 was to be the International Year of Disabled Persons. Many countries used it to talk to disabled people and their families to ask them what changes they wanted to see. In other countries, not much happened.

1983 The World Programme of Action for Disabled People

The next big step was the World Programme of Action in Favour of Disabled People which came out in 1983. All the disability groups worked with the UN to produce a strong statement on the rights of disabled people to become full citizens of their countries and local communities. The key words were *participation and equality of opportunity*.

UN Decades of Disabled People 1983-1992; 1993-2002.

This World Programme of Action was used to launch two UN Ten Year plans of Disabled Persons. Some countries used these to make real progress but many did not.

The UN then developed Ten Year Plans for the different regions of the world. The most successful of these plans were for the Asian region; these got some good results.

All this time there was pressure from disabled people for the kind of Convention which has now been won. Sweden, Italy and several other countries tried to propose a Convention to the United Nations. But not enough countries agreed.

1983 The Standard Rules on Equal Opportunities for Disabled People

So the UN did the next best thing. They brought together some people

from several governments and from the world-wide disability community to produce the 22 Standard Rules about the basic rights of disabled people – such as rights to health, education, work and leisure.

Victor Wahlstrom

Victor Wahlstrom represented Inclusion International, together with Maria Malbran from Argentina and Gare de Zaldo from Mexico. They did a great job.

Bengt Lindqvist

The group had a brilliant leader in Bengt Lindqvist. He was a leader of the world movement of blind people and also a former minister in the Swedish government.

Bengt Lindqvist travelled to many countries and listened to the opinions of disabled people about the changes they wanted to see in their lives. He then met members of the government and told them very clearly how they could improve matters in their country. Some of them listened but many did little or nothing.

So the Standard Rules were excellent but governments could ignore them if they wanted to. This is why we needed a Convention which had the strength of an international law.

WE TOO CAN MAKE HISTORY

So you see why 2010 is the most important year since Inclusion International was born 50 years ago. Never before has there been such a chance to make a difference to the day to day lives of people with disabilities, their families and the people who support them. This is why we all have to make the best of this wonderful opportunity - not just for the people who are living now but also for our children and their children.

So it's up to all of us in this room and in this conference to go back to our countries and insist that our governments make sure that this Convention is not just beautiful words. It is up to our governments to take the first steps to see to it that the Convention opens a new chapter in the history of human rights for disabled people, their families and indeed for everybody.

That way we too will be making history.

I leave you with the words of President Obama:

CAN WE CHANGE SOCIETY?

YES WE CAN!