AIIC Sign Language Network at WASLI 2015

The World Association of Sign Language Interpreters brought together interpreters, trainers and researchers from 54 countries at its Istanbul conference.

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Sign language interpreters, trainers and researchers from around the world flocked to Istanbul this past July to attend meetings of the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI) and the Congress of the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD). Elisabet Tiselius and I were there for the WASLI meeting on behalf of the AIIC Sign Language Network. Opportunities to learn from each other abounded with some 275 participants from 54 countries present.

For those of you not familiar with our field, let me start by explaining that WASLI is an international NGO representing sign languages interpreters across the globe. One of its central purposes is to promote professionalization by helping countries establish national associations and lobby for effective training and standards of practice. Such collaboration drives our meetings and even our informal conversations outside the conference hall or over a meal. In Istanbul we discussed, amongst other things, ways to advance the interpreting profession in regions such as Central America and Africa and to encourage research by practitioners, as well as an imperative to seek support when needed.

We got down to work even before the conference proper started with pre-meeting workshops on topics like deafblind persons, international sign (IS) and the professional interpreter. The formal two-day WASLI conference was organized around the theme of Human Rights: Where do interpreters fit in? Two major topics were on the agenda. The first addressed the importance of cooperation between deaf consumers and interpreters, defining them as allies. The keynote presentation by Liz Scott Gibson (former president of efsli and WASLI) and Markku Jokinen (former WFD president and current president of the European Union of the Deaf) covered all aspects of the topic with due consideration and a deft touch of humor. In order to improve cooperation, deaf academics need to be involved in training sign language interpreters and we also need trained deaf interpreters in all fields especially in sensitive human rights work with children and refugees, and in mental health settings.

On the second day we went on to examine current laws and policies in regard to the rights of deaf people. Christopher Stone and Robert Adams, respectively hearing and deaf sign language interpreters and well-known researchers and activists in the field, took the lead. They provided the audience with an overview of international laws and policies,
such as specific articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which can be used to lobby for better access to education or society through professional interpreting services. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Access to Work in the UK were some of the best practice examples mentioned.

Along the way Elisabet and I had the opportunity to address an enthusiastic audience on AIIC — its principles, its goals, and the added value of becoming a member. AIIC currently has two sign language interpreter members, and one of the aims of the presentation was to encourage sign language interpreters working at conferences to join. We answered many questions about the application process. It was apparent that the interest was great. To assist interested colleagues we had special cards printed with the URLs of AIIC and the Sign Language Network, as well as our pictures so that conference participants could easily find us for any further questions they might have.

During the WASLI general assembly following the conference I held a short information session for those who had been unable to attend the previous presentation.

During the GA we heard about what WASLI had accomplished since it’s previous conference, such as advances made within its regions and by the Task Force on International Sign and Process for Hiring. And on the collaboration front, WASLI President Deborah Russell signed a memorandum of understanding with FIT President Henry Liu.

It’s always good to meet with peers, learn from each other and return home feeling reinvigorated. So take note: The next WASLI conference will take place in July 2019 in Paris!

More on WASLI

- The keynote presentations were broadcast live on Streetleverage and can be still be viewed (in international sign only) by clicking these links: Liz Scott Gibson & Markku Jokinen and Dr. Robert Adam & Dr. Christopher Stone.
- WASLI 2015 on twitter: #WASLI2015
- WASLI on twitter: @WASLI_tweets
- WASLI on the web: www.wasli.org

Recommended citation format: