

Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA)

Report on the international conference for the 10th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, promotion of the rights of women and girls with disability by the UN CRPD

Seoul, South Korea, 18-19 October, 2016’

*Report prepared by Karin Swift for Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA)*

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## Contact



*Winner, National Human Rights Award 2001*

*Winner, National Violence Prevention Award 1999*

*Winner, Tasmanian Women's Safety Award 2008*

*Certificate of Merit, Australian Crime & Violence Prevention Awards 2008*

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1 Acknowledgments

I feel truly privileged to have been given the opportunity to represent WWDA at this important international conference for women and girls with disability and immerse myself in rich cultural experiences and share strategies, high level conversations and also some laughs with some truly amazing women leaders with disability. In particular, I would like to acknowledge:

* Carolyn Frohmader, Executive Director of WWDA: an amazing leader who has given so much of herself through her tireless and enduring work to ensure the rights of all women with disability are upheld. Thank you for giving women with disability opportunities to be leaders and for the trust and faith you have shown in me.
* Miyeon Mijoo Kim, President of Women with Disabilities Arts and Cultural Network, Board member of the Korean Disabilities Association, Chairperson of the CRPD NGO Forum: 감사합니다 kamsahamnida (thank you), Mijoo for organising such an amazing conference for women with disability from around the world to speak about human rights and experience some Korean culture. Thank you also for being such a gracious host to all of us whilst visiting your wonderful country.
* The many amazing women (and men) leaders with disability I met from around the world: thank you for your stories, wisdom and strategies, and all the fun and laughter we shared too!
* WWDA Board: for your continued support of WWDA’s work and me as the Acting-President.
* Louise Stott, Personal Care Assistant & CPL: thanks Louise for another amazing adventure (our first overseas!), for regularly going above and beyond the call of duty, particularly given the challenges on the last day, and for all of your wonderful support and friendship for over 8 years! Thanks also to CPL, in particular Service Manager, Amanda Pointon and Service Facilitator Ryan Doyle, for enabling me this opportunity to travel overseas with quality support and ensuring it happened seamlessly.
* My husband, David Swift and family: thank you for your support through yet another one of my journeys. Your unconditional love and support of me is what makes it possible for me to keep challenging myself. A special thank you to David for being my International Roaming Consultant ☺ x

2 Introduction

WWDA has an international reputation as a leader in the promotion of human rights for women and girls with disability. In August 2016, WWDA Executive Director, Carolyn Frohmader, was invited to speak at an International Conference: Promotion of the Rights of Women and Girls with Disability by the UN CRPD in Seoul, South Korea from the 18-19 October 2016. Unfortunately, due to other commitments, Carolyn did not have capacity to attend the conference. WWDA Acting President, Karin Swift, attended the Conference on Carolyn’s behalf.

The Conference was held at Glad Hotel Yeouido, Seoul. One hundred and fifty people from 14 countries participated in the conference.

The key themes of the conference were:

* The human rights crisis of women and girls with disability
* Opinions and experiences of promoting the rights of women and girls with disability utilising UN mechanisms.

The conference was hosted by Women with Disabilities Arts and Cultural Network (WWDACN). Co-hosts of the conference included: Korea Disability Law Association, International Disability Alliance, Handicap International, Hope and Law, Sungkyunkwan University DDA Center, Saenuri Party, Kyungwan Nu, The Minjoo Party, Mihyuk Kwan, People’s Party, Joohyun Park, Justice Party, Soha Youn and Member of Seoul Metropolitan Council, Changyoun Yoo.

Karin gave two presentations at the conference:

* Day 1: a panel discussion giving feedback from an Australian perspective on an interpretation of the General Comment on Article 6 of the CRPD given by Theresia Degener, Vice Chair of the UN CRPD Committee.
* Day 2: a workshop presentation that was part of a series of Parallel Reports given by women with disability from each country present at the conference on the status of women with disability and the UN CRPD and CEDAW, entitled: “Using a human rights framework to advance the rights of women and girls with disability”, which shared many strategies that WWDA has found successful in working in the global human rights space.

This report highlights Karin’s work and experiences representing WWDA at this international human rights conference.

3 Background

The “International Conference for the 10th Anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD), Promotion of the Rights of Women and Girls with Disability by the UN CRPD” held in Seoul, South Korea from the 18-19 October was an international conference comprising of participants from around the world including: Australia, China, India, Italy, Japan, Germany, Korea, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, Philippines, Thailand, USA and Vanuatu.

This International Conference provided an opportunity to reflect on the last 10 years and particularly how Article 6 Women with disabilities and other relevant articles of the UN CRPD have been implemented at the national, regional, and international level and have changed the lives of women with disabilities.

This conference provided an international guideline and resources to which States parties (countries that have signed up to the UN CRPD) can refer to in order to interpret, develop, and implement Article 6 and relevant articles of the UN CRPD aimed at advancing the rights of women and girls with disabilities. The conference also aimed to educate women with disabilities global leaders about how to interpret, develop, monitor and implement Article 6 and other relevant articles of the UN CRPD and to develop an international network for women with disabilities aimed at sharing information on effective strategies to implement the UN CRPD.

The conference also provided an intensive workshop in which women with disability from the Asia Pacific région who have experience in submitting shadow reports and monitoring the implementation of the CRPD could share their knowledge and technical strategies. Additionally, for women with disabilities who have not yet experienced it, they were able to acquire knowledge on how to write shadow reports and monitor governments for successful implementation of the CRPD. Furthermore, women extended their understanding about the General Comment on article 6 and engaged in discussing its implementation and made strategies on sustaining and strengthening the women with disabilities network into the future.

4 Women with Disabilities Global Leaders / Participants

**Miyeon Kim**, Korea, President of Women With Disabilities Arts and Cultural Network, Board Member of Korean Disabilities Association, Chairperson of the CRPD UN Forum

**Judith Heumann**, USA, Special Advisor for International Disability Rights at the US Department of State (apology)

**Theresia Degener**, Germany, Vice-Chairperson of UN CRPD Committee

**Nelly Caleb**, Vanuatu, Board Member of International Disability Alliance (IDA), Co-Chairperson of Pacific Disability Forum, Coordinator of the Disability Promotion and Advocacy Association of Vanuatu

**Allesandra Aresu**, Italy, Manager of Handicap International Country Director for China

**Susan Sygall**, USA, Co-founder and CEO of Mobility International USA

**Younghen Yu**, Korea, Chairperson of Korean Differently Abled Women United

**Nakyoung Lee**, Korea, Chairperson of Korean Association of the Blind Women

**Daesung Kim**, Korea, Asia and Pacific DPO United Chairperson, DPI Korea Chairperson Kyungsuk Park, Korea, Principal of Nodl Night School for People with Disability, Representative of Asia-Pacific Disability Forum

**Kyangyee Kim**, Korea, Representative of Differently-abled Women’s Imaging and Acting Group Masl

**Bokjoo Bae**, Korea, Representative of Women with Disabilities Empathy

**Yoonjung Joo**, Korea, Representative of Seoul National University Asia Research Center

**Jaeeun Jung**, Korea, Korea University Law School PhD

**Karin Swift**, Australia, Acting-President of Women With Disabilities Australia

**Victoria Lee**, Australia, Human Rights Officer of UN Treaty Bodies’ International Disability Alliance

**Alison de Franco**, USA, US and International Disability Committee, Consultant of International Disability Law

**Gerei Dondovdorj**, Mongolia, President of the Mongolian Federation of the Blind, Policy Advisor on persons with disability of the Ministry of Development and Population and Social Welfare and the Ministry of Education and Labour, Mongolia

**Saowalak Thongkauy**, Thailand, Asian Disability Forum, Chairperson of Association of Empowerment of Potential of Women with Disabilities

**Yukiko Katsumata**, Japan, Director of the Department of Information Gathering and Analysis of the National Institute of Social Security Research Center

**Audrey Lee**, Malaysia, Programme Manager of the International Women’s Rights Action Watch in Asia Pacific

**Tika Dahai**, Nepal, Vice President of National Federation of the Disabled Nepal (NFDN), Vice President and Senior Advisor of Association of Women with Disabilities Nepal

**Sarita Lamichihane**, Napal, Nepali Women’s Disability Rights Activist

**Liza Martinez**, Philippines, Founder of Philippine Deaf Resource Center

**Nguyen Thi Lan Anh**, Thailand, Director of the Action to Community Development Center

**Kumiko Fujiwara**, Japan, Chairperson of DPI Women’s Network Japan (DWNJ)

**Keiko Kano**, Japan, Professor of Social Work at Kansai University

**Mami Goibuchi**, Japan, Manager of DPI Advocacy Center

**Kimie Nagumo**, Japan, Staff of HANDS Setagayo

**Urnmul Kher**, India, Indian Women’s Disability Rights Activitst

**Xie Yan**, China, Director of One Plus One Disabled Persons’ Culture Development Center

**Peng Yujiao**, China, Project Officer at One Plus One Disabled Persons’ Culture Development Center

**Tongwon Kim**, Korea, Social Welfare Professor at Sungkyunkwan University, Sungkyunkwan ODA Research Center

**Jaechun Won**, Korea, US and International Law Professor at Handong Global University, Director of Handong Global University Unification and Peace Center

**Patricia Goedde**, USA, Sungkyunkwan University Law Professor

**Eukyung Kang**, Korea, Korea National University of Arts Professor

**Jaehoon Kim**, Korea, Law Firm Lee & Ko, Representing Lawyer

**Sungtaek Lim**, Korea, President of Korea Disability Law Association, Lawyer of JIPYONG, Board Memver of Duroo

**Wonhee Cho**, Korea, Lawyer of Bae, Kim and Lee, LLC; Chairman of the Persons with Disabilities Subcommittee, Director of the Dongcheon Public Interest Foundation

**Seokpyo Hong**, Korea, Lawyer of Lee & Ko, Pro bono committee assistant administrator and legal services for the disabled

**Jieun Lee**, Korea, Member of Korea and New York bar Legal, General Counsel of PCA life Korea

**Minhee Ryu**, Korea, Hope and Law, Lawyer

5 Day 1

The conference opened with conference organiser and host, Miyeon Kim welcoming participants, setting the scene and giving opening remarks. This was followed by welcoming speeches of key heads of Korean Government and congratulatory messages from human rights organisations, government officials and other allies. There was also a moving opening performance by musicians from the Korea National University of Arts.

Five keynote speeches followed the morning presentations. Theresia Degener, Vice president of the UN CRPD committee set the scene by acknowledging the 10th anniversary of the UN CRPD and the significance of the rights of women with disabilities. Further keynote speeches were given regarding the process of establishing the UN CRPD Article 6 Women with Disabilities and its significance. This was followed by two presentations from the United States of America on the implementation of the Americas with Disabilities Act and other US monitoring systems and the empowerment of women with disabilities, giving a case study of Women In Leadership Development (WILD) by Susan Sygall, CEO of Mobility International USA.

After lunch, Karin was on a discussion panel for a workshop entitled Women and Girls with Disabilities in UN CRPD. The workshop began with Theresia Degener giving an overview and interpretation of the General Comment of Article 6 of the UN CRPD. This was followed by a panel discussion by four conference participants giving their country’s perspective on the General Comment. The panel consisted of Yoonjung Joo from Korea, Gerei Dondovdorj from Mongolia, Karin Swift from Australia and Gwangee Kim from Korea. A full transcript of Karin’s presentation is in Appendix A of this report. In summary, Karin gave a brief explanation of Article 6 and the usefulness of the General Comment. Karin gave an example of how WWDA has used the General Comment and all the Conventions and Treaties to which Australia is a party to inform its work. Theresia was very supportive of WWDA’s presentation and thanked Karin for her remarks and acknowledged Karin’s comments about Article 6 being immediate and cross-cutting.

After the afternoon tea break, Victoria Lee (Australia) from the International Disability Alliance gave an in-depth presentation on how the rights of women with disabilities can be mapped through the various UN Treaties. This presentation closely aligned with how WWDA does its work, in that WWDA uses a holistic human rights approach in its advocacy work and looks beyond the CRPD to map this out. This was followed by a presentation on international discrimination and women with disabilities. These papers were followed by panel discussions from participants from Japan, Italy, Korea and Malaysia. The day concluded with a period of comprehensive discussion where participants highlighted key themes from the day. This was followed by the conference dinner.

The conference dinner enabled global leaders to get to know one another and socialise in a less formal setting. Highlights included a performance by a renowned Korean folk singer who is blind, cutting of the conference cake which was made by a pastry chef who was deaf and brief introductions of each conference delegate.

6 Day 2

The second day of the conference provided an opportunity for women global leaders with disability to gather together in a less formal workshop to share information, strategies, learnings and experiences of working with UN processes. Participants delivered parallel reports regarding the status of the implementation of the UN CRPD in their county and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Each of the countries represented at the conference gave brief 15 minute reports on their country’s progress. Karin Swift delivered WWDA’s presentation on the status of human rights for women and girls with disabilities in Australia. Links to the full copy of Karin’s presentation, authored by Carolyn Frohmader and Karin Swift and accompanying Powerpoint presentation and a human rights video that was made by WWDA are available in Appendix 2 of this report.

Karin’s presentation was entitled: “Using a Holistic Human Rights Framework to Advance the Rights of Women and Girls with Disability”. It gave a brief overview of WWDA and the status of women and girls with disability in Australia. The paper then discussed eight key strategies involved in the holistic framework that WWDA uses to advance the rights of women and girls with disability, citing specific examples of WWDA’s work in each of the strategies. These strategies include:

1. Using the full range of International Human Rights Treaties
2. Using Treaty Body General Comments
3. Shadow Reporting
4. NGO Delegations to UN Treaty Body Compliance Reviews
5. Working with UN Special Procedures
6. Using the UN Charter Based Bodies
7. Forming strategic alliances, building coalitions and working collaboratively
8. Monitoring developments

After lunch there was a brief workshop facilitated by Victoria Lee from IDA about the process of writing parallel reports. Due to the extensive knowledge demonstrated in the morning session by women who were reporting on the status of their own countries, this presentation was amended to include specific strategies that IDA had found useful and tips for engaging with the UN.

The late afternoon session was a short facilitated discussion on where to now for this international group of women. The day concluded with several women choosing to dine out at a local restaurant, debrief about the conference and socialise, with contact details being swapped for further connection in the future. This was a fitting end to an amazing conference.

7 Post Conference

During the last session of the conference there was discussion about the future for this amazing group of leaders. Various possibilities were discussed such as the group forming an international collective of women with disability, developing some papers on key themes such as violence against women and girls with disability, using UN processes and protocols, preparing shadow reports and the Millennium Development Goals.

Since the conference there has been several email discussions and sharing of resources among the group, such as an IDA and International Disability Development Consortium Sector Development Goals Toolkit (see: <http://internationaldisabilityalliance.org/en/article/2030-agenda-toolkit-and-guide-persons-disabilities> for further information. There has also been a closed Facebook group established called: “Women and Girls with Disabilities International Action” for the purpose of keeping in touch and sharing knowledge, information and ideas.

Karin is pleased to stay connected to this wonderful network of women and keep WWDA informed of developments within the group.

8 Personal Reflections

I felt privileged to be able to attend and speak at this international human rights conference for women with disability. It was an amazing experience to connect with women with disability from around the world and share our stories, understandings and struggles of fighting for and maintaining human rights. While each of us had different backgrounds and came from countries that may have had different cultural, political or social understandings of disability, it was heartening to see that internationally the advocacy movement is fierce. There is strong leadership by powerful women speaking on issues with wisdom, passion and a collective voice. Despite our differences, each country spoke to similar issues in their presentations with issues such as violence and freedom of sexual identity being key issues for women with disability worldwide. The understanding that human rights were universal and unequivocal was common knowledge among the group.

I came away from the conference energised in mind and spirit, ready to share my knowledge and use what I had learned in my local community and networks. One particular thing that has resonated with me was in a presentation by Victoria Lee where she shared how she had been looking at the commonly used human rights phrase: ‘Nothing about us without us!’ She had done some editing of the phrase to carry us forward:

*Nothing about us without us!*

Nothing ~~about~~ without us!

**Nothing without us!**

What at first looks like a simple editorial change has profound meaning for the disability rights movement? By deleting the words “about us”, we are essentially saying that we shouldn’t just be involved in matters concerning us (ie “disability rights”, “disability policy”, “disability services”); we should be involved in everything so that there is literally nothing without us. We have the right to be involved in everything affecting the world we live in. This was perhaps the most profound take home message I received from the conference.

Although, I feel immensely honoured to have represented WWDA at this and other International human rights events and conferences, each time I do it has a profound effect on me physically and emotionally. I thought I would share some strategies and insights here that some WWDA members may find useful.

When I travel domestically I use the Eagle Lift (a hoist-like device owned by Qantas to assist passengers who have difficulty transferring independently). They do not have this device internationally, so if you cannot self-transfer, you need to be prepared for airport and airline staff to assist you any way they can. This may involve a degree of manual handling that you are not used to and will likely be by male staff. In most cases, care is taken to ensure this is done safely and with dignity and respect to the person being assisted, however, it can still at times be a confronting personal experience to have people you don’t know assist you in such a personal way. Language and culture may also be a barrier here as people assisting you may not understand instructions given by yourself or your support person. I believe advocacy is needed to ensure devises such the Eagle Lift are available in airports worldwide so that people with disability can travel independently and with confidence and have their right to freedom of movement upheld.[[1]](#footnote-1)

When you travel anywhere it is important not to underestimate the increased energy or stamina you will need as you may need to do things differently to the way you do things at home and this will require an ability to think differently and be able to come up with solutions that are safe and reasonable. Language and culture may also be an additional factor here as the people you may need to call on for assistance may not understand English or have English as a first language.

It is also important to keep calm and be able to strategise, especially when things go wrong. For this reason, it is essential to have contact numbers (even for people or services you may not realise you will need such as your equipment repairer in Australia), travel documents, insurance details and medical information close at hand when they are needed. It is also important to consider international roaming options with your telephone and internet provider before you travel so that you are able to easily call people in Australia in an emergency, if needed. It is important to have a family member or friend in Australia as a contact person for you. They can help you to negotiate with services and supports in Australia or overseas if things go wrong. It is also good to hear a familiar voice on the end of the phone if situations become stressful. It is also useful for this person to have good communication skills as they may need to speak to people in the country you are visiting.

Everybody is different, however, when you get home it is important to be able to give yourself time to rest and recover from travel before resuming your usual level of activity. This is important even if things have gone relatively smoothly. I work in paid employment and have found it is important to request a few additional days of leave to recuperate from an international trip. You may find you need extra support (formal or informal) when you get home as it may take a while to get back into your usual routine and ways of doing things.

Representing WWDA internationally can be an extremely rewarding experience but it is important to take measures to take care of yourself as well. This will ensure you are in a better position to share your experiences with others when you return and are also able to follow through with any post-trip commitments you have such as report writing, small presentations and keeping in touch with people you have met overseas.

Appendix 1

## Panel discussion – Workshop 1 Women and girls with Disability and the UN CRPD, Day 1 by Karin Swift

Kamsahamnida (thank you). My name is Karin Swift and I am here today at this fabulous conference in my capacity of Acting-President of Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA). I am also here representing our wonderful Executive Director Carolyn Frohmader (many of you may know of her) who was unable to travel to South Korea to attend and speak at this conference. Carolyn works tirelessly in Australia to defend the human rights of women and girls with disability.

I want to begin my discussion today by making a few comments on Article 6 of the CRPD – Women with disabilities. Article 6 is both immediate and cross-cutting. This means that State parties (countries that have signed the Convention) have an obligation to enact the article right now. This differs to other articles such as Article 9 – Accessibility where State parties have time to develop plans to demonstrate how they will meet their obligations under that article. Cross-cutting means that it does not stand alone in and of itself, but that it applies to all of the other articles. For example, State parties are required to demonstrate specific strategies they have in place to ensure that women with disability experience full enjoyment of their human rights under Article 24 – Education, Article 25 – Health and Article 27 – Work and employment, to name a few.

WWDA provided feedback on the draft General Comment on Article 6 when it was released alongside other DPOs and human rights organisations.

WWDA believes that the final General Comment on Article 6 is a strong, robust document that each of our organisations present here today can use in our advocacy and lobbying work alongside other General Comments on other Articles and Conventions.

My presentation tomorrow will go into more detail about this but I would to present one example now of how WWDA has done this in our work. Recently WWDA developed a series of Position Statements:

* WWDA Position Statement 1: The Right to Freedom from all Forms of Violence
* WWDA Position Statement 2: The Right to Decision-Making
* WWDA Position Statement 3: The Right to Participation
* WWDA Position Statement 4: Sexual and Reproductive Rights

WWDA used the General Comment on Article 6 to develop these Position Statements. We also used General Comments made on Articles in CEDAW, the Convention Against Torture (CAT) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), to name a few.

We have copies of our Position Statements here. Please come and see me in the break if you would like a copy or further information, thank you.

Appendix 2

## Supporting materials

Women with Disabilities Australia (WWDA): 'Using a Holistic Human Rights Framework to Advance The Rights of Women and Girls with Disability: Presentation to Women With Disability Arts and Cultural Network International Conference, Seoul, Korea' (October 2016).

This paper and presentation outlines how WWDA uses a holistic human rights framework to advance the rights of all women and girls with disability. In the decade since the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), WWDA has made significant inroads to advancing the rights and freedoms of women and girls with disability. Utilising a holistic human rights framework in all aspects of our work has enabled us to conduct ground-breaking and critically acclaimed programs which address a wide range of human rights issues for women and girls with disability.

Download full paper and presentation slides:**PDF**

<http://wwda.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/WWDA_Swift_Conference_Presentation_Seoul_2016.pdf>

**DOC**

<http://wwda.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/WWDA_Swift_Conference_Presentation_Seoul_2016.docx>

**PPT**

<http://wwda.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/WWDA_PP_Seoul_Conf2016.pptx>

1. The right to freedom of movement is contained in Articles 12 and 13 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). See also Article 10 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and Article 18 on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Article 5 of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and Article 15 of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). See: <https://www.ag.gov.au/RightsAndProtections/HumanRights/Human-rights-scrutiny/PublicSectorGuidanceSheets/Pages/Righttofreedomofmovement.aspx> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)