



# WASLI

World Association of  
Sign Language Interpreters

## **Separate Deaf Interpreter Associations or Inclusive and Collaborative Interpreting Associations for All?**

### **WASLI's Position**

WASLI strongly values collaboration within the profession of signed language interpreting. Everyday we work with and for many people; deaf people, hearing people, deaf interpreters, hearing interpreters, institutions, etc. Outside of the interpreting assignments we are also members of a community of professionals. In this community we see deaf and hearing interpreting colleagues as equal members of an interpreting team, and of an interpreting organization.

There are many countries that seek WASLI's opinion about the relationships among deaf signed language interpreters and the established interpreter communities. One of the questions that we have received recently seeks our opinion about the need for separate deaf interpreter associations. The issue was also put to the floor at the recent efsli AGM in Athens, Greece (September 2016) by the efsliDI (a sub-committee of efsli with representation to the efsli board, representing deaf

interpreters at the European level).

WASLI is not in a position to dictate local practices and/or influence the cultural aspects that exist in a country. However, we have a position that has been adopted by the Board of Directors and our Regional Representatives and it is described below (adopted September 2016):

WASLI encourages models of collaboration. There are associations around the world of signed language interpreters that are inclusive of both hearing and deaf interpreters. Deaf interpreters are active members of the association, conferences are accessible in both the spoken and signed languages of the country, and communication to members comes in both languages on important issues. These associations recognize that deaf and hearing interpreters have much to learn from each other and include all interpreters in the organisation and its activities. They also acknowledge the specific needs of interpreters and offer training events for either hearing or deaf interpreters only. However, the association belongs to both deaf and hearing interpreters equally.

WASLI is aware that there are signed language interpreter associations that embrace collaboration and welcome hearing and deaf interpreters as equal members. However, there are still associations around the globe who resist the concept of deaf interpreters, and are not inclusive in their practices. They may choose to only communicate in a spoken language in their meetings, and consciously or unconsciously privilege the ability to hear. They may choose not to work with deaf interpreters where there is a clear opportunity to provide exceptional service through a deaf and hearing interpreter team.

One of the consequences is the emergence of deaf interpreter associations. In some countries deaf interpreters do not feel viewed equally by several of their hearing colleagues. They are not welcomed and included in established associations. At times deaf interpreters express the preference to establish their own associations, based on the assumption that collaboration with hearing colleagues is not possible or necessary.

Based on these developments and taking into account the future of the profession, WASLI wants to put forward this statement.

We want to strongly encourage interpreter associations to actively and authentically work with their deaf interpreter colleagues to include them in their associations as full, active members, with access to information in the national signed language. We have many deaf colleagues who are open-minded about being part of a profession, and by doing so, support deaf-hearing collaborations within a shared association.

There are associations around the world showing us that collaboration is not only possible, but also profitable for the interpreters and the community.

With collaboration, we all can advance the signed language interpreting community. Divisions between colleagues do not help us to build the kind of relationships needed to nurture our profession.

Respectfully submitted, Debra Russell on behalf of the WASLI Board of Directors