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NZ Sign Language Bill Clears First Reading

The NZSL Bill had its first reading in Parliament on 22 June 2004.

More than 70 members of the Deaf community travelled from around the country to witness this event.

For those who could not travel to Wellington, the debate was broadcast live over the internet. Over 200 people are estimated to have watched the debate in this way.

The Minister for Disability Issues Hon Ruth Dyson spoke first and was followed by speakers from each political party. Deaf people were impressed with the level of Deaf cultural awareness demonstrated in the MPs' speeches.

At the conclusion of each speech the public gave an uproarious Deaf cultural applause of raised and waving hands. The MPs also joined in with the applause.

Deaf community leaders described having their language and culture acknowledged in Parliament as a



Pictured are members of the Deaf community on the steps of Parliament after attending the NZ Sign Language Bill's first reading. Everyone is applauding the Deaf-cultural way by raising their hands and shaking them.

deeply moving and historical moment. Many were moved to tears and some watching on the internet said they were "jumping up and down and screaming" with joy.

Interpreters were present for the debate and a TV camera enlarged images of the interpreters onto two TV screens in the public gallery. It was only the second time sign language interpreters had interpreted on the floor in

Parliament, and the first time during debate on legislation.

The Bill was referred to the Justice and Electoral Select Committee. Submissions were due by 27 August 2004. Future issues of Disability Issues News will report on the Bill's progress.

Information on the NZ Sign Language Bill is available on the Office website at www.odi.govt.nz/about/nzsl.html

Development Of A Nominations Database

The Office for Disability Issues has held a series of meetings with the disability community and sector to discuss how a proposed register for nominating disabled people for Government appointments can best operate.

The register will help the Office identify and nominate disabled people for the range of appointments that are made every year. The register will also help to identify people who can advise on issues where a disability perspective is needed.

Director Jan Scown says the Office is often asked by government agencies and Ministers to put forward the names of disabled people who have the experience and skills to fill particular positions thereby encouraging diversity in boards. These can include appointments to

district health boards or community trusts and boards of Crown companies.

Jan says the meetings with the disability community and sector generated excellent ideas for encouraging people to submit their names and profiles to the register. There was also useful advice about the support people would need both before and after taking up an appointment.

"We're aware that many disabled people have the potential to fill these positions but do not yet have the skills and experience that will help them to be selected," Jan says.

The next newsletter will have more information about how people can become involved.

NZ Input On Draft Convention

A delegation of New Zealand government officials, representatives of disabled people and the Human Rights Commission recently attended the third meeting of a United Nations Committee in New York.



The NZ delegation included from front row left to right: Gary Williams and Wendi Wicks (Disabled Persons Assembly - DPA), Andrew Begg (NZ Mission to UN). Back row left to right: Mary O'Hagen (Mental Health Commission), Chris Hansen (National Advisory Group for Like Minds, Like Mine project), Robyn Hunt (Human Rights Commission), Mike Gourley (DPA), Valerie Meyer (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade) and Jan Scown (Office for Disability Issues).

This Committee was set up to draft a convention on the rights of disabled people. It consists of 199 countries and participants from 12 international non-government organisations representing disabled people.

The full range of civil, political, economic, social and cultural human rights applies to all people. However, the United Nations has found that many disabled people's rights are not honoured or even understood. This is partly because of the relative invisibility of disabled people under existing human rights mechanisms. It is also partly because it is not clear enough to many countries what they need to do to uphold the rights for disabled people.

The draft convention text outlines the steps Governments are obliged to take to better promote the rights of disabled people.

New Zealand had a significant role in developing this draft and is active in negotiating with other countries to ensure it is ratified as a binding treaty which protects and promotes the rights of disabled people. A fourth meeting is being held this month and New Zealand will again be represented.

The draft convention is available online at: www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/rights

Briefly

Elections for District Health Boards (DHBs) will be held in October 2004. There are 21 boards and all are responsible for ensuring that a district's health and disability needs are catered for. Nominations close on 20 August 2004. For further information on standing as a candidate call freephone 0508 910 2004, contact your DHB or local authority or access information on the internet at www.moh.govt.nz/dhbelections or www.lgnz.co.nz/projects/vote/

The Parliamentary Counsel Office has restored free public access to legislation over the internet at the Knowledge Basket website: www.knowledge-basket.co.nz. This includes access to Supplementary Order Papers and to Bills. The Knowledge Basket's historical collection, which includes legislation repealed or revoked since the collection was first started in 1987, is also available again for free public browsing.

A full report analysing data collected in the 2001 post census disability surveys will be available by the end of August 2004 at www.moh.govt.nz. The data tables used in the analysis will also be made available for the first time. A summary of the report will be launched on 1 December 2004. This analysis was undertaken by Statistics NZ in consultation with the Ministry of Health and the Office for Disability Issues.

To help disabled people participate in the Parliamentary process of legislation, IHC Advocacy, the Office for Disability Issues and the Office of the Clerk of the House have produced an easy to read and pictorial translation of 'Making a Submission to a Parliamentary Select Committee'. Go to www.odi.govt.nz/publications/publications.html

Seven video clips in NZ Sign Language have been added to the Office's website, as a step towards making information more accessible to Deaf people. Produced by the Office with assistance from the Deaf Association, the video clips summarise in NZ Sign Language key information on the Minister for Disability Issues, the Office for Disability Issues, processes of legislation at Parliament, the content of the NZ Sign Language Bill and how to make a submission. To view access www.odi.govt.nz