



World Right-to-Die Newsletter

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT**JACOB KOHNSTAMM**

TOKYO: Living Wills Among Ways for Dignified Death

The 15th Biennial Conference of our World Federation, held in Tokyo from September 30 to October 3, 2004

was an overall success. Our Japanese colleagues from Japan Society for Death with Dignity (JSDD)—and their WF board member Dr. Michio Arakawa in particular—have taught all “overseas” visitors an unequalled lesson in hospitality; moreover, a programme was presented in which many of the participants, if not all, could select their own interests socially and in terms of the program content. Our Japanese friends apparently also knew how to influence the weather gods in such a way that not many of the international guests were aware that Japan was racked this fall by a successive series of typhoons and earthquakes!

The board of WFRtDS and all visitors from all over the world who participated in the 15th World Congress, are most grateful for the excellent way the hosts of JSDD have performed their tasks.

On the deliberations and decisions during the delegates’ meeting you can read separately in this newsletter so I will not go into these now. I would only like to memorialise the way I was chosen to be your new President. Of course, I seriously prepared my presentation as a candidate, since it is not a sinecure to succeed Michael Irwin who has directed

the WFRtDS the past two years in such an exemplary way. But, also, my opponent for the presidency was no one less than Derek Humphry, in my eyes one of the “godfathers” of our movement.

Naturally, I also have—as a politician—earned my credits in the history of euthanasia, through my 25-year-long involvement as chairman of a political party, as member of the Dutch parliament and as member of the Dutch Government. I have proven both in deed and in writing to be a strong and loyal advocate for the legalisation of euthanasia in the Netherlands. But my contributions—especially internationally seen—to the endeavours that bind us, are wiped out by all Derek’s actions in this field in the past. It was finally Derek’s intervention itself during the session that saw me, and not Derek, elected. In his presentation he himself made a passionate and heartfelt plea not to choose him, but myself. That’s how it happened. (*Also, see the letter from Juana Betancor, who had been the Vice President of the WF, page 5.*)

In this, my first president’s report, I would certainly like to call your attention to the following, mainly on the basis of our meetings and mutual discussions in Tokyo.

Each of us is active in one way or the other in achieving our main ambition as WFRtDS: the possibility for an individual to finally be allowed, both in practice and by law, to make a decision in what way, and when, he or she may leave life. Sidney Rosoff reminded us during the

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New Board for World Fed



Top Row: Richard MacDonald, Derek Humphry, Juan Mendoza-Vega, Libby Drake, Annalies Plaisant, Michio Arakawa
Bottom row: Cynthia St. John, Jacqueline Herremans, Faye Girsh, Jacob Kohnstamm, Michael Irwin

Elected as president of the World Federation of Right to Die Societies for 2004-6 was **Jacob Kohnstamm**, of the Netherlands, and as vice-president, **Jacqueline Herremans** of Belgium. Both are attorneys.

Mr. Kohnstamm is chairman of Right-to-Die NL (NVVE), the second largest such organization in the world after the Japanese group. Aged 54, he spent 25 years as a politician, helping to mould the Dutch euthanasia laws, and is now full-time chairman of the Dutch Data Protection Authority.

Ms. Herremans, who will become president at the next world conference to be held in Toronto in 2006, is currently president of the Association for the Right to Die With Dignity, in Brussels. Since Belgium passed its Euthanasia laws in 2002, she has been a member of the Federal Commission of Control and Evaluation on the Law on Euthanasia.

Annelies Plaisant, of End-of-Life Choices-Florida, was re-elected treasurer of the World Federation, and **Libby Drake** (UK) continued as Secretary, a post she has held for the past six years.

Faye Girsh (End-of-Life Choices, USA) was elected newsletter editor

in succession to **Derek Humphry** (President of ERGO, USA), who became an honorary board member in recognition of his 25 years of service to the World Federation.

Dr. Michael Irwin, Board member of FATE (Scotland) serves as Past-President as does **Dr. Richard MacDonald** (Medical Director, End-of-Life Choices. At-large members include **Cynthia St. John**, Board member Death with Dignity Canada; **Dr. Michio Arakawa**, Board Member Japan Society for Dying with Dignity, and **Dr. Juan Mendoza-Vega**, Board member DMD-Colombia.

Three New Organizations Join WF

New member organizations elected to the World Federation of Right-to-Die Societies at its conference in Tokyo on October 3 were:

1. **Libera Uscita**, Rome, Italy
(Interim member)
Alessandra Sannella
2. **Final Exit Network**,
Atlanta, Georgia, USA
Earl Wettstein
3. **SAVES**, Durbin, South Africa
(re-admitted after lapsed
membership) Louise Pallett

There are currently 40 member groups in the World Federation, with membership in each society

ranging from 20 to 105,000.

Member Society Changes

OLD MEMBER: Contact has been resumed with The Indian Society to Die with Dignity which is currently conducting an essay competition for college students on the rights of the individual in matters related to death.

MERGERS: End-of-Life Choices (formerly The Hemlock Society USA) merged with Compassion in Dying. The new organization will be called Compassion and Choices and will continue to be based in Colorado and Oregon. Both organizations are WF members.

In New Zealand the Voluntary Euthanasia Society of Wellington merged with the Voluntary Euthanasia Society (Auckland) Inc. The new national organization will be known as the Voluntary Euthanasia Society of New Zealand Inc. Its office will be in Auckland.

WF Board Decisions

- A working group of the Board has been formed to develop uniformity on the terminology and definitions around End of Life decisions. It will report to the 2006 biennial conference.
- The maximum a Member Society would pay in fees annually would increase from US\$250 to US\$1000. The fee is based on 1% of the society's income. The minimum would now be \$50.

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