



Office No: 102, First Floor, Plot No: 19-A, Vishal Complex, Patparganj Village
Opp: Una Enclave Apartments, Mayur Vihar Phase-1, Delhi 110091
Mobile: 9894058041, 7406542409 Email: contactsignalsli@gmail.com Website: www.signalsli.org

I thank The National Research Association for Sign Language Interpretation (NRASLI) profusely for the financial support extended to enable me to attend the WASLI Asia Interpreters' Meeting 2024, at Yogyakarta, from 14th – 17th August 2024.

The experience has been enriching and diverse. Meeting Interpreters from 15 countries was inspiring as well as educational. Since this was a smaller group of 46 Interpreters, Deaf and Hearing, there was much more engagement and camaraderie throughout the 4 days that we spent together.

The 2-day event was kicked off by a warm welcome note by Ms. Noriko Miyazawa, WASLI Asia RR, followed by the Presidential address by Dr. Christopher Stone, WASLI President. It was a very encouraging call out on building strong partnerships and collaborations between Deaf Associations and Interpreter Organizations for betterment of the profession through exchange of knowledge and experience, support through setting up of Organizations in countries that do not have interpreter Associations, fruitful discussions and sharing of information on org structures, new initiatives, conflict resolutions, team working with Deaf Interpreters and ensuring equitable compensations, etc., and how all these regional collective efforts would pave way for the larger deliberations at WASLI Conference, UAE in 2027.

On Day 1, after the keynote session, Juan Druetta, ISAAB member from Argentina walked us through an extensive discussion on WFD/WASLI Accreditation of IS Interpreters, moderated by Ms. Noriko Miyazawa. He explained the norms and what it entails to be a Deaf Interpreter and how qualified and proficient a Hearing Interpreter has to be in order to feed content in a manner that reflects smooth output. He impressed upon the importance of strengthening spoken and signed languages and Continuing Professional Development and improvement in techniques of interpreting and be better channels of Deaf & Hearing cultures. He narrated some of his experiences with Interpreters and the teamwork and sync that one needs to be in, in order for the delivery to be accurate and efficient. He also offered some tips on how a Deaf Interpreter can work efficiently by taking input from the Feeding Interpreter in addition to using closed captioning option on devices, and thorough preparation of the material beforehand, and personal notes. This session indeed set the tone to the rest of the 2-day agenda.

The next session delved into a panel discussion with representatives from PNASLI- Philippines, KASLI-South Korea and JASLI – Japan moderated by Lucy Lim.

John Xandre Baliza shared the pioneering efforts in Philippines, subsequent to the Filipino Sign Language Act in 2016, with De La Salle- College of Saint Benilde in initiating Bachelor's Degree Course in Sign Language Interpretation, as opposed to Interpreter Training Programme, thereby ensuring professional readiness of Interpreters. There was collaboration witnessed through the National Coordination Network for Interpreting in the coming together of three National Interpreting Organizations working with the Commission of Filipino Languages in the implementation of FSL Law. Through guidance from WASLI,

and international expertise, the programme is presently midway, inviting support in framing curriculum and mentorship of the cohort through lectures, webinars, etc.,

The social status of Interpreters in the republic of Korea was shared by the next panelist starting off with the history of an unofficial SLI certification in the country, going all the way back to 1997, having completed 20 National Accredited Private Qualification Sign Language Interpretation Exam till date, with the outcome of 15,000 applicants and 1,927 successful Interpreters as of 2023. Professional Interpreter Training Institutes have been established in 2009 in 9 cities, along with Korean Association of the Deaf, issuing Nationally Recognised Private Qualification ID Card as Interpreters for candidates scoring 60 points or above in a paid-programme comprising practical and written examinations testing Korean language and Sign language skills in addition to an-indepth understanding of Welfare of Persons with Disabilities, Deaf community & Culture and Fundamentals of Sign Language Interpreting. The Korean Association of the Deaf has also initiated a non-accredited private qualification for Deaf Interpreters with similar testing procedures.

It was really surprising for me to know that there are about 195 Centres operating across the country to provide access to Deaf members in the form of Government-related information, health and medical services, welfare and counselling and video relay services. Information on KASLI was shared. With 155 Hearing and 134 Deaf members KASLI has been conducting many regular activities and collaborative programmes.

The discussion ended with information from Japan on the training and qualification system for SLIs and their social status. This was a completely different angle for me to know that the Sign Language Volunteer & Interpreter

Trainer Program falls under the Ministry of Health and Welfare, in Japan, and resources were prepared and Curriculum is offered as 90-hr SLI Training Program for those who complete(d) a 80-hour Volunteer Training Program, as a pre-requisite. Upon passing the test conducted annually, the Interpreters are eligible to register and practice as certified paid-interpreter with a certain payment norms. There are monitoring regulations in place such as Interpreters are required to work in election broadcast after undergoing a specified training and retake exams once every 5 years. The challenges seemed to be that the younger generation were not picking up the profession and the certified interpreters are in the age range of 40+.

Understanding the social status of interpreters in the 3 different countries along with the training programmes was very helpful to compare where India is as a country, with only about 500 certified Interpreters offering accessibility services to the 18 Million Deaf population comprising 4.5 Million Sign Language users. It made me reflective and think further on what ASLI India could do with the National Association of the Deaf in developing trained and competent interpreters.

The discussion broke into QnAs with several questions posed by the participants such as the level of team working between HIs(Hearing Interpreters) & DIs (Deaf Interpreters), and the amount of involvement of DIs in decision making, visibility, deliberations with hearing stakeholders, preparation required for DIs especially in interpreting concerts or musical/theatrical events, etc.,

The time that I was able to take with interpreters to understand their work in their countries and settings was eye-opening for me. As it was a closer circle, I

was able to interact and engage productively, though it was not enough to do justice.

Day 2 agenda consisted of panel discussion with JUPEBIM-Malaysia, AJBII-Indonesia and ASLI India, on Setting Up Interpreter Organizations in the respective countries.

As the President of ASLI India, I consider it a privilege for having shared space with Malaysian and Indonesian Representatives on this international platform to impart information such as the Need & Purpose, Vision & Goals, Membership Structure, Governance & leadership, Programmes & Services, Collaboration & Outreach, Funding & Sustainability, Evaluation & Improvement, Challenges & Solutions.

I will summarise the history and present workings of ASLI here:

ASLI was founded in the year 2007 as a registered entity with Deaf and Hearing members on board. As the primary need for an association specifically for Sign Language Interpreters is to ensure professional standards, advocate for the rights and recognition of interpreters, provide ongoing education, and foster a supportive community. Such an association strengthens the profession and enhances the quality of services provided to the Deaf and hard-of-hearing communities. ASLI went about doing exactly that for the initial 5- 8 years. Finding interpreters was the earliest task undertaken and finding a board that was willing to share the load properly was the next, moving on to training mostly CODAs, the then members.

Our org has been supporting interpreters and deaf persons in an environment that is indifferent at best and hostile at worst to the needs for access for deaf

people. Group mentoring and problem solving are important functions we perform.

We offer key benefits like professional development, networking opportunities, access to resources, and advocacy for fair wages. These benefits enhance members' skills, expand their professional connections, and improve job satisfaction, leading to a more empowered and unified community of interpreters, positively impacting their career growth and job security.

The association aligns its goals with the broader needs of the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing community by actively involving them in decision-making, advocating for accessibility rights, and ensuring interpreters are culturally competent. By promoting high standards in interpreting services, providing ongoing education, and supporting legislative efforts that benefit the Deaf community, the association strengthens the relationship between interpreters and those they serve, fostering trust and mutual respect, ultimately enhancing communication and inclusion.

India has no Domain-specific training in the 2-year Interpreter Training Diploma course under the Rehabilitation Council of India. ASLI conducts webinars and panel discussions with experts in the field on varied topics as Continued Professional Development.

We hold space for Open discussions called Terp Talks - “Kaam ki baat” (meaning talk about work) and on whatsapp. The terps are all busy with life and work. Its taking time to help persons understand that they need to make time to grow and develop and how much this growth is dependent on further reading study and becoming more aware of the profession.

ASLI has held 5 National Conferences in the last 17 years and has 135 members and the numbers add up every month. Our goal is to support upcoming interpreters and strengthen the ones in the field. The annual membership fee is a nominal ₹ 500 (about 6 USD). Members receive an ID Card.

Deaf Interpreters is fairly new concept in India and we have a few Deaf signers excellent in relaying between ISL and ASL, BSL & IS through a few platforms and opportunities. We are hoping to have more Deaf Interpreters in India.

Building a client base in corporate and Civil society orgs, promoting access for deaf people are handled by ASLI by providing livelihood opportunities for Interpreters and on-the-job training, establishing norms and systems in corporates, etc.,

ASLI has achieved some milestones in the judiciary as the High Court in the capital city of India, has empanelled a team of SLIs who are called for Deaf hearings and remunerated through the Government Department, which is a first in the country. Other states are in the process of replicating the model.

ASLI & NAD (National Association of Deaf) have worked with the Electoral Department in training police personnel and volunteers in Indian Sign Language and has deployed Interpreters and Deaf volunteers at polling booths as yet another first.

ASLI contributed extensively to this panel through its experience as an Association for over 15 years, having worked closely with the Government Agencies and Corporates in partnership with Deaf Associations.

Indonesia on the other hand, was noted to be a fairly new Organization and has held several advocacy efforts. Some of the challenges faced by the members we were told, were lack of awareness in the community of the accessibility

needs of Deaf individuals and professional certification system, Interpreters working as Sign Language Instructors and many teachers working as Interpreters. There was much to offer from our side for a strong org set up and positive collaborations, sharing of curriculum and resources.

JUPEBIM seemed to be a strong association with much expert guidance and through various activities and collaboration with international bodies to train Interpreters by organizing sessions by expert speakers, and providing outreach opportunities for national and state wide events. They also seem to experience reluctance for upskilling and challenges in Deaf & Hearing partnership, and clear understanding of the profession.

The last two sessions included a brief presentation on the ethics of Sign Language Interpreters by ISLIA (Indian Sign Language Interpreters Association). The code of Ethics from A-Z has also been translated in ISL by Deaf experts and shared with the interpreting fraternity for reference and resource.

The final slot for Day 2 ended with a discussion on the way forward. Divided into region-wise groups, there were extensive discussions on the group's top three (3) interpreting challenges/needs that must be immediately addressed, and three (3) activities to propose to WASLI Asia before 2027, and also look at how our group can support the work of WASLI Asia and what contributions can be pledged.

In the South Asia Group consisting of India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Maldives, India seemed to have established ITPs, Strong Association presence, membership structure, which we offered to support the other countries that are working towards these. There was also an offer to host WASLI Asia meeting in Nepal or India and to have a regular connect to exchange ideas and initiatives and success models.

The Conference ended with closing remarks and summary of the two-day workshop and vote of thanks. The Gala dinner was a very special evening, where the participants got a chance to witness amazing performances and interact with the WFD RSA Representatives as well. It was an enjoyable evening and efforts were much appreciated.

I take back precious memories along with broad knowledge acquisition.

I am extremely thankful to NRASLI for the opportunity that I was presented with to attend WASLI Asia Interpreters' Meeting. I have started on IS Course and am learning and practicing with a goal to be able to converse better in IS by July 2025, to ready myself to attend 1st WASLI Asia Conference and contribute my learning and experiences.

With Sincere Appreciation

Dr. Renuka Rameshan

President, ASLI India

