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Comment on the official German translation of the CRPD

An official German translation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) was developed and concluded by the governments of Germany, Austria, Liechtenstein and Switzerland. However, persons with disabilities did not participate in the process of this translation. There are several inaccuracies in the official translation, which can lead to profound misinterpretations of the CRPD in German speaking countries. As a consequence, members of the Independent Living Movement in Germany developed a shadow translation that we prefer to use and distribute.¹ However, the governments as well as the public administrations always use the official translation.

With our own focus on independent living we are particularly concerned about the misleading translation of the term 'independent living'. Internationally, activists have always used this term to make clear that persons with disabilities do not want to be controlled by others, neither by medical or other professionals, nor by parents or attendants. This includes the refusal of being subject to the rules and structures of specialised institutions. Consequently, persons with disabilities ask for self-determination and self-government, not only in their own organisations, but also individually in their own lives. With appropriate personal and technical support, persons with disabilities can live the life they themselves want to live. However, the German word used in the official translation (“unabhängiges Leben”) indicates that independent living means living without any help or support, which is the opposite of the actual meaning. German speaking members of the Independent Living Movement have always used the term self-determination (“Selbstbestimmung“ respectively “Selbstbestimmt Leben”) to translate the English term “independent living”. The inaccurate translation in the official German version is a poignant reminder of how the lack of participation by persons with disabilities can lead to misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the most basic aims of the Convention.

We urgently ask the Committee to reference the weaknesses of the official German translation of the CRPD and to ask the government for a review with adequate participation of persons with disabilities.

¹ The shadow translation can be downloaded here:

http://www.netzwerk-artikel-3.de/attachments/093_nw3_schatteneubersetzung_screenreader.rtf