

CHICAGO 19 SEPTEMBRE 2014 CONGRÈS INTERNATIONAL

It is an honour and a great pleasure for me to speak at the same tribune as Madame la députée Véronique Hivon. She assumed for the last four years an exceptional political leadership and worked with great wisdom to advance our the law on medical aid -in dying as part of other measures for end -of life care for all citizens of Québec . Every one will recognize the difficult challenge of keeping this issue out of the usual partisan division between political partys .

On behalf of Aqdmnd I take the opportunity of this 20th International congress of the WFRTDS to congratulate and thank warmly Madame Véronique Hivon and hope that other elected members in Canada will have the same determination and conviction .

Yvon Bureau present to day at this table made a tremendous contribution to this cause since 1987 . He is the first person that I know who brought attention for the right for each person to a peaceful death. Member of many Associations fighting for the cause and founder of a Québec city sister organisation, he was advocating for Living Wills and was a pioneer in this matter 20 years before AQDMD was created . He is now co -President with Ghislain Le-

blond of the Collectif Mourir Digne et Libre (which means the Movement for a Dignified and Free Death) .

I would like to make a special tribute to the co -president Ghislain Leblond who could not be present to day. Ghislain suffers from a orphan pathology who resemble to Lou Gehrig disease. I will quote his exact words that he said at the hearings of the special commission on the Question of Dying in Dignity in Marsh 2010.

« If the worst case scenario which terrifies me were to materialize, if I knew to day that I would have help , the type of help I would want at that moment, if I knew for sure, it would be there and accessible, then my quality of life to -day , and that of my family would be so much better. »

Ghislain said exactly why we are making this battle.

Jean Mercier is professor of Political Sciences at Laval University in Québec . He joined the movement at the time of the Commission on the question of dying with dignity . In 2011 he spent 3 months as part of a sabbatical year in Brussels with Pr Jan Bernheim and also visited other leaders and experts in Belgium, Netherlands and Switzerland.

Jean is a skilled debater and he organized conferences in Québec at Laval University and in Lyon ,France that were a great success .

To understand how in such a short period this movement for a self-chosen death was possible, one should understand the deep social and political transformations, context and forces that prevail in Québec since the nineteen sixties.

In most countries two very powerful lobbies usually are the most important opposition; the Catholic church and the medical profession.

On the religious and social questions

For 100 years Quebec was described as the Church ridden province in Canada. Now we are probably one of the least religion led society, specially when religious leaders try to impose their values concerning our private lives. On the question of abortion, homosexuality or religious practices, a large part of the population from left to right, older people and the generation of baby boomers, quebecers are more secular in general than elsewhere in western world. The memory of the power of the Catholic church on the life of our parents and ancestors, their domination on a population where women had 12 - 15 children because contraception was against God plan is probably still present. In the last years I was giving conferences in residence for seniors and every time some old man or lady would come and say « My Mom suffered so much because of religion principles, they wont decide for me any more ». The common sense of people who have compassion and empathy

for the sufferings of their fellow citizens and also the important aging of the population makes people aware that their turn will come soon and they want to decide when it's time to say « Enough ... please help me doctor » The religious leaders except on rare occasion were silent or had no influence . Most people do not believe that you are a better person if you suffer and the Palliative care leaders lost with the arguments of the acceptation of natural death. Doctors or priest can't play God any more.

The real turning point was the position of the second big lobby . The Medical profession and their representative were open to have a conversation on the question of end- of -life -care and argued that the present law and medical ethic were sometimes in conflict and not adapted to the actual context .They wanted clear guidelines for the best practice of medicine and protection of the population .

The Canadian Bill of rights in 1980 and Québec's Civil code adopted in 1994 were determinant factors for self- determination values .

Rogrigues's cry « Who owns my life » was still present in Francine Lalonde ears when she became Member of Parlement of Canada in 1993.

She was aware that some states and societies had voted law that gave the choice to decide when and how we could die .

The question of dying in dignity became her personal commitment . She was concerned by the responsibility of the legislators to debate once again this question and worked on a bill that she presented in October 2005 in Ottawa.

We were friends since her first election in 1984 , and she wanted to have my feelings and comments when writing her speech before the House of Commons . I had never thought getting involved in this cause but my experience and memories of inhuman sufferings of patients that I had accompanied as a young nurse where still there and at that moment I felt the same revolt against this non sense I always though that we should help human beings to die in peace . Certain agonies are unacceptable, After a life 's engagement in social organizations , I decided I would give a hand to start an Association for a Right to die .

The Medical profession decided to take part in the public debate The Faculty of Medicine of the University of Montréal's conference on the subject in April 2006 was followed by the decision of Dr Yves Lamontagne , president of the College of Physicians of Québec to invite Francine Lalonde as speaker at the annual general assembly in

June .Before a panel of experts of different backgrounds , well known jurists and Philosophesr in Ethics , an assembly of 300 doctors listen to Francine and the Q/A period lasted more than one hour . She had invited me to be present at her side , not knowing what would come out of this meeting . Dr Yves Lamontagne thanked her warmly and announced that he would mandate a special committee to study the situation and opinion of the medical profession on this matter .

The second big lobby, the medical profession would take part in the social debate not closing the door. They knew they would be concerned in any event.

After this annual medical meeting, Francine left for Strasbourg . On her way back , she stopped in Brussels to meet Jacqueline Herremans , then invited her in Montréal en route for Toronto for the International Congress of WFRtDS of September 2006.

From then on , our relations with the members of this great family were determinant. Many pioneers were mentors and guides and legislations elsewhere were models for our Association. We live in a small world and with the help of the WFRTDS we took advantage of all the work that our predecessors have done .

After our foundation in September 2007 a small group of volunteers worked hard at one level or another . We respond to all invitations to speak to media radio , television and conferences with professionals as well as citizens associations . We also invited our friends from Belgium to explain their law on Euthanasia , participated in the legal challenge of Ginette Leblanc , who like Sue Rodrigues and Gloria Taylor , wanted to die before the onset of a terrible agony . AQDMD favoured a team's work formula and members from the medical profession , law and persons in other social and administration fields were involved .

All this was done practically without ideological division between our members since we did focus only one goal . Give the patient 's choice to a peaceful and gentle death when his or her sufferings were unbearable. The law is not as generous as one could dream but it is a wise compromise and we are happy since it is a great social progress .

In the name of AQDMD I thank the president of this conference Faye Girsh and Dr Richard Mac Donald for the time they allowed for Québec's delegation.

I can not name individually all those who really made the difference in our debate in Québec but many persons involved in the World Federation at some point or another were important figures for our Association. Thanks to each one of you .

Now the « pièce de résistance » of this afternoon conference Madame Véronique Hivon will explain her part of this long journey.

19 septembre 2014

Hélène Bolduc , présidente de l'Association pour le droit de mourir dans la dignité .