***“Access to Assistive Technology is a basic human right” - 15th international AAATE conference closes with the Bologna Declaration, a new Global Alliance and a wealth of research results and expert knowledge***

**Press Release**

**30 August 2019**

**Bologna, Italy:** “It is a very appropriate moment to come together and work on moving accessibility technology forwards as there never has been as much attention paid to this field as right now.” With these words AAATE president Luc de Witte opened the 15th AAATE conference dedicated to discussing “Global Challenges in AT: Research, Policy & Practice” on 28 August in Bologna.

The three days gathering of over 360 AT experts was proceeded by workshops and a high-level meeting on “Unlocking the Human Potential” which resulted in the Bologna Declaration, a public statement written with the support of different stakeholders expressing dissatisfaction with the current situation that many people with disabilities lack access to appropriate assistive technology, and listing 10 concrete areas for action. The Bologna Declaration can be endorsed on the aaate.net website (<https://aaate.net/the-bologna-declaration>) and will serve to push the agenda in the AT field forward.

In a wonderful keynote Prof. Malcolm MacLachlan from Maynooth University (Ireland) then set the scene by outlining 10 key challenges, ranging from the sustainable development goals to research, intersectionality and the system’s gap. These themes were taken up and discussed in detail across the policy workshops and educational sessions throughout the three days, in parallel to the presentation of the 233 scientific contributions.

There was consensus that AT are tools to ensure the equal participation of persons with disabilities in society and economy and that access to AT is a fundamental human right. Representatives of the disability community were firm that this need has to turn into a demand on political level – starting with the implementation of the UNCPRD and trickling down to all policy levels.

One venue to coordinate this demand on a global level as well as serve as the bridge between high-level policy and implementation on the ground, will be the newly formalized Global Alliance of Assistive Technology Organizations (GAATO), which held its first general assembly adjacent to the conference (link to PR on GAATO).

AAATE also uses these bi-yearly conferences to honor people that have greatly contributed to the AT field. In 2019, the AAATE Diamond Award went to Claudio Bitelli, in the past leader of the AT Centre of AIAS in Bologna and one of the initiators of the CLIC network of AT centers in Italy, as well as Dr. Marcia Scherer, President of the Institute for Matching Person & Technology and founding Editor of the journal, Disability and Rehabilitation – both have contributed and shaped the international AT field for over 25 years.

Furthermore, the Best Paper Award went to Tone Oderuda, Cosmas Mnyanyi et al. for their paper on “Developing Tablet Audiometry for Screening Children's Hearing in Tanzania”, and Sarah Gavra Boland (@SarahGBoland) received the #AAATE2019 Twitter Award for great reporting from and during the conference via Twitter.

Katarina Mavrou, who will follow Luc de Witte as AAATE’s president from January 2020 onwards and next president elect Georgios Kouroupetroglou closed the conference with the announcement of the #AAATE2021 in Paris and the invitation to not only see the challenges but also embrace the many opportunities the AT sector has to offer.

Closing the circle to Malcom’s keynote speech and his 10 global challenges in AT, one #AAATE2019 Twitterer beautifully concluded on these two takeaways: “a) aim for impact and b) embrace systems thinking”. AAATE2021 will be the opportunity to check on our progress. “So, come to Paris to show the richness of what we can do with AT!”, was the invitation to all participants by Dominique Archambault, co-organiser of #AAATE2021, before our 380 participants took the way home.

**Contact:**

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**Media page:**

The conference organisers are happy to collaborate with media professionals for an extensive coverage of the conference: <https://aaate2019.eu/media-centre/>

**Twitter:**

Regular updates are posted on @aaate\_net and under the hashtag #AAATE2019.

**About AAATE**

The Association for the Advancement of Assistive Technology in Europe (AAATE) is the interdisciplinary pan-European association devoted to all aspects of assistive technology, such as use, research, development, manufacture, supply, provision and policy. The AAATE’s mission is “to stimulate the advancement of assistive technology for the benefit of people with disabilities, including elderly people” and over 250 members from all over Europe and throughout the world are already taking part in AAATE’s activities.