**From International to Global & the Bologna Declaration**

**1st General Assembly of the Global Alliance of Assistive Technology Organizations (GAATO)**

27 July 2019

**Bologna, Italy:** “Never has there been so much attention on assistive technology than right now.” With these words Roger Smith, past president of RESNA opened the first official General Assembly of the Global Alliance of Assistive Technology Organizations (GAATO).

The seeds for GAATO were laid in 2000, when 4 organizations (AAATE, ARATA, RESNA, RESJA) decided to join forces to better move the agenda on assistive technology (AT) forward. In 2016, two more organizations, namely RESKO and TREATS, joined in.

All these organizations are motivated by the wish “to advance the field of assistive technology (AT) and rehabilitation engineering (RE) to benefit people with disabilities and functional limitations of all ages” – as per GAATO’s mission statement. As well as the need to coordinate on a global level for a coherent approach and way forward – which led to this first official general assembly and the wish to become more structured as alliance.

“The strength of this alliance lies in the huge amount of competence in its ranks and also that it is neither part of government nor industry. Instead it is a third party that can be the connecting piece between policy and high-level initiatives like WHO’s GATE and ATscale with the people on the ground who work with people with disabilities and older users and everyone who potentially needs assistive technology”, said Evert-Jan Hoogerwerf, Co-Chair of the GAATO.

Why is there a need for GAATO? For one, AT is increasingly an issue of global concern and despite existing solutions there rare still many people that could benefit but lack access to AT. On the other, AT is an area where we can learn from our mutual experience and work together on standards, training, good practice and policies. Furthermore, there does not exist yet a unified global platform to represent the AT sector and coordinate with governments and international bodies such as the WHO and UN.

Areas where GAATO intends to make a difference include policy, research, innovation and development.

In 2019, GAATO (formerly IAATO, the International Alliance of Assistive Technology Organizations) received 6 more applications for membership, 4 of which were accepted in this 1st General Assembly, and 2 being accepted as associate members.

The assembly was closed with a call for collaboration with regional and national assistive technology organisations (<http://aaate.net/2019/05/15/call-for-collaboration-global-challenges-require-global-action/>) and the commitment to move the AT field forward on a global level.

**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.

<https://aaate.net>

**About ARATA**

ARATA is a national association whose purpose is to serve as a forum for information sharing and liaison between people who are involved with the use, prescription, customisation, supply and ongoing support of assistive technology.

Our focus is the advancement of rehabilitation and assistive technology in Australia, through activities including conferences, special interest groups, website, listserver, membership directory and a newsletter.

<https://www.arata.org.au>

**About RESJA**

The RESJA is an organization concerned with application of science and technology in the rehabilitation process. The membership includes rehabilitation professionals (engineers, medical staffs, teachers for handicapped children ,etc), providers (makers and dealers), and consumers (disabled persons).

<https://www.resja.or.jp/english/index.html>

**About RESKO**

Rehabilitation Engineering & Assistive Technology Society of Korea

<http://resko.jams.or.kr>

**About RESNA**

RESNA, the Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America, is the premier professional organization dedicated to promoting the health and well-being of people with disabilities through increasing access to technology solutions. RESNA advances the field by offering certification, continuing education, and professional development; developing assistive technology standards; promoting research and public policy; and sponsoring forums for the exchange of information and ideas to meet the needs of our multidisciplinary constituency.

<https://www.resna.org>

**About TREATS**

Taiwan Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society, TREATS, was established in 2011. Our members include experts and scholars from various fields such as medical physician, rehabilitation engineering, physiotherapist, occupational therapist, special education, social workers, and etc.

<http://www.treats.org.tw/index.php?Lang=2>

**About ATIA**

The ATIA is the premier organization for manufacturers, sellers and providers of assistive technology (AT)—products, equipment and systems that enhance learning, working and daily living for persons with disabilities.

<https://www.atia.org/about-atia/>

**About AATA**

Asociacion Argentina de Tecnologia Asistiva: Promover el acceso y el uso efectivo de recursos de Tecnología Asistiva para facilitar la participación activa, inclusiva de las personas con discapacidad.

<http://www.aata-inclusion.org.ar>

**About BATA**

BATA members are suppliers, AT professionals and  organisations who provide support to individuals with disabilities who need Assistive Technology solutions. We provide an information and signposting service to the public in directing enquiries  to relevant members (and other relevant groups/organisations).

<https://bataonline.org.uk>

**About the EASTIN network**

The EASTIN Association includes 7 Partners, 16 Affiliates and 4 external National Contact Organization. The core of the network is the online information system www.eastin.eu, which provides – currently in 24 languages – information on AT products available in various countries, supplying companies and other useful material such as fact sheets, case studies and manuals.

<http://www.eastin.eu/en/WhatIsEastin/Index>