

<https://doi.org/10.31287/FT.en.2025.1.2>

Article published: 30th June, 2025

Panel discussion

Abstract

The 9th Disability Science Conference took place on the 23rd of November 2023. Below is the panel discussion that was organized by Gábor's dear friends and colleagues.

Keywords: Gábor Gombos, Validity Foundation, psychosocial disabilities



Kerekasztal

Absztrakt

2023. november 23-án került megrendezésre a Gombos Gábor emlékének dedikált 9. Fogyatékoságtudományi Konferencia. Alább olvasható a Gombos Gáborról szóló kerekasztal-beszélgetés, melynek résztvevői Gábor jó barátai, pályatársai.

Kulcsszavak: Gombos Gábor, Validity Alapítvány, pszichoszociális fogyatékoságok

Introduction

The Editorial Team encountered technical difficulties in writing the text. First of all, the audio material was live speech, but not in the native language. In addition, the quality of the spoken text to be transcribed left a lot to be desired. In spite of all of the above, we decided to publish it. Our responsible decision is based on the fact that the ideas expressed, the historical narratives and the memory of Gábor Gombos are all for the publication of the material.

Panel discussion

Participants:

Sándor (Sanyi) Gurbai (Validity Foundation)

Dalma Földes (independent advocate)

Amita Dhanda (Professor emerita, NALSAR University of Law)

György (Gyuri, George) Könczei (Professor emeritus, ELTE Eötvös Loránd University)



Sándor: Good afternoon to all of you. It is so great to see so many familiar faces. It's definitely great to have this panel discussion today. As you know, it will be about Gábor, his legacy, heritage and thoughts. And I would like to thank Amita, Dalma and Gyuri for accepting to be on this panel today. I am glad that we are here together. You were Gábor's friends, so it definitely is something which brings us together. I think I will immediately turn to the panelists, but before that I want to ask my colleagues to project the first photo of Gábor, please.

In the meantime, I would like to ask my first question, and this is to all of you. It was mentioned in the introduction that all of you were there in New York for the negotiations for the CRPD, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (**The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)**), and Gábor was also there, in New York. He participated in this process. Was that where you first met him, in New York, or did you meet Gábor somewhere else? Could you please share your memories about the defining encounters with him? Amita, perhaps you can start. You are wearing a nice sari today.

Amita: I'm wearing a sari today because I don't think I can come to an event for Gábor without wearing a sari. He would have told me "You are not giving me importance enough", if I had come in pants or worn any other clothes. So, this is like, you could say, major. When did I meet him? Well, I met him in New York and I've been thinking about it since you asked me that question, as to how I would answer it. Because my memory of how I met Gábor was that we were all required to stand in these long queues, not George the but rest of us, because we had to get to register to get into the ad hoc committee. And there were so many people in the line who kept saying: "You know, Gábor has come, Gábor Gombos has come" and I was wondering who this guy was. Who was this guy that they were making so much heavy weather of? I didn't know, an ignorant Indian, I had no clue who he was, and I just saw him from a distance wearing one of those Russian fur cap kind of things, which is what he wore for that particular meeting. That's my memory of seeing him. After that, I don't really know when we started to talk, or who spoke first, or what happened.

My next memory of him is only that we were having lunch together, we were sharing water. We used to sit next to each other in the ad hoc committee deliberations

and we had something like what we call our five-star system, where we would give stars to various people who spoke and say “Ah, this one did a good job. That one was horrible. Why this question? Why not that one?”, and we just did it as a running commentary. Maybe this was our way of coping because it was a stressful conference. I think this was where I became friends with Gábor. He had, I think, a proverbial poker face, you would not find expressions coming, and so with that poker face, to suddenly discover a person who had such an amazing sense of humor, so much mischief, all of the kinds of things which, at least for me, are like what I feel shows on my face and my hands go with it, and stuff like that, and here was this Hungarian who would sort of make it like nothing affected him, and then you actually found it was not true. Everything affected him. So, over a period of time, I started to learn, to recognize those expressions and say “okay, this is what is happening”. It is like you make friends with a poker face; you learn how to decipher a poker face. I think that was one of the biggest things which happened to me, and so much else. Subsequent to which I came to Hungary, and he came to India, and we have been friends ever since. We’ve had our fights, but I don’t think that is what today is about.

Sándor: I think I remember that Russian fur hat, we went with Gábor to Moscow, it was wintertime, and it was really cold in Moscow. Thank you for sharing. Dalma, would you like to continue?

Dalma: I met Gábor in 2002 in New York on the occasion that the landmine survivor network organized an express training for people with disabilities and disabled people organizations before the second ad hoc committee meeting. I did not know Gábor before. At that time, I worked for the landmine survivor network advocacy department. It is very important in the book, (*The World – Without Cage Beds. World-shaping Narratives by Gábor Gombos*) (Könczei et al., 2023, p. 197), Gábor is talking fondly about this training. This training was so important for people with disabilities before the ad hoc committee because most of these disability advocates had never ever participated at the UN conference, and participating at the UN conference and the treaty negotiation process was a totally different process than any other process that we faced during our activity time. I had the possibility to work for the international campaign to ban landmines, and we were the first organizations, the first NGOs and advocates who could participate as experts at the Ottawa treaty (*Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction*). I underline the function of expert because it was our intention and their organizations became experts, and during this training, my colleagues, who I will name because they are the key activists and players in this field: professor Janet Lord, Chatty Gransee and Kirsten Young, we all worked together in the landmine survivor network advocacy department, and I was not part of the training. I was part of the organizer team. So, my colleagues told me: “Oh, you know Gábor Gombos?” And I said “No.” That time I was living in Yemen and before that, for 20 years I had been working abroad. All my life, at least in my adult life. I was so thrilled and impressed by all of Gábor’s comments and critique and intellectual honesty on the topic during the training. On the first day I asked him whether we could go for lunch together. We went to lunch, and we started to talk. We both talked about our childhoods, which is very important in the book, and we found a lot of



common things and we found that we needed to continue. During the evening, we stuck together and for all the rest of the two days we would stick together, and we shared a lot of our experience of what kind of non-violent direct action had been done in the world so far. This was our first meeting during the Convention process and when I moved back to Hungary in 2006, I met Gábor again.

Sándor: Thank you very much. Would you like to continue, Gyuri?

György: Thank you. Let me start with what Amita mentioned before. She was speaking about the queue.

Amita: Were you there?

György: No. You are right. I was not there. Because, unfortunately or fortunately, I was a government representative who could just pass through the security and then simply enter the UN building. But the queue was arguably the most important element that could happen at this convention, or in this whole process. Let me explain what I mean. I quoted it someday in a university lecture some years ago.

Since Hungary became a member state of the European Union, I had not been alone at the *Hungary* sign at the table any more. We all, as EU member states' representatives had to speak in one voice. And this one voice was prepared by all of us EU member states' representatives just one or two hours before the meetings. At the very first meeting the representative of the Czech Republic asked all of us EU Member States' representatives at this close plenary in the morning: "Have you heard that 120 international disability organizations will join this working group today? We *will not have enough space* in the room!" Please recognize that it was not about the *space* at all, it was really about the focus of discourse, who owned the discourse, who controlled the discourse, and about who would represent millions of people with disabilities. So, the queue worked. The queue was very important.

Just before this, Gábor visited me here, in this building of the faculty. I had a room on the second floor. He visited me, we were sitting in my room, and then I realized the greatness of the person. Just very few people know that then I decided to work in order to have him as an honorary doctor of the Bárczi. Well, it could not work, but that was my first impression of Gábor, at our first meeting. The realization of the greatness of that spirit. Thank you.

Sándor: Thank you, Gyuri. I think I would just like to underline some of the keywords. The first is definitely the queue, right? The second can be the training which was mentioned by Dalma. So, queue, training, the other one is lunch. You had lunch with Gábor, I think that's important. I remember he liked having lunch and liked having discussions during lunch. But you didn't mention another keyword, which was really relevant in Gábor's life. Do you know what that is?

Amita: Coffee...

Sándor: Yes, exactly, coffee. You did not mention that, but fine.

Amita: You didn't mention the wine either.

Sándor: Yes, wine. That's true, wine.

Amita: And the cigarettes.

Sándor: But wine comes first.

Amita: Athen in this kind of anti-tobacco campaign and stuff like that, you would feel all that intensity of the human rights advocate telling you what was wrong with this anti-tobacco campaign and with the way that they were making us the new untouchables. And that they were pretending that if you stopped smoking, all health problems would be solved. It was like the scientist and the human rights advocate joining together. You just had to listen to him if you said that one should not be smoking. If you dared to.

Sándor: Yeah, I remember that we were taking long flights with Gábor together. Gábor, of course, couldn't smoke on the flight, but we asked for plenty of coffee and wine instead of him smoking. Alright now, if I'm a very good moderator, then I should get the link to the next topic. The link is the training. I would like to ask if you can play the video. This video recording is a very short one, but this is about a training session, like a short video of that. Let's watch it together. Perhaps we can have these lights switched off for a bit. Thank you.

Video (Gábor Gombos): "People with disabilities live in social exclusion. That is why we need the convention as an international human rights tool to change this situation. But because people live in social exclusion, for instance, communities do not feel any responsibility to do a number of things that they are willing to provide for other vulnerable or oppressed or abused groups of society, like women who survived domestic violence. The next problem is how you can initiate the change through these existing instruments, what the law can do, and what other things can do. What I just want to emphasize is that another experience I had is that people often have unrealistic and exaggerated expectations about the legislative side of the implementation of the convention. While I do think that especially if you are talking about the paradigm shift from substituted decision-making to this much more human approach (legal capacity) which is adopted by the convention. There is a need for legislative changes, no question about that, but legislative changes alone will not bring about the paradigm shift, and it needs a number of other things as well. If we look at the question of abuse, how effective can law be in abuse prevention? I don't want to get an answer from you right now. I just want you to think about it."

Sándor: Thank you so much for this video. In this video, Gábor talks about, as we heard, social exclusion, the need for the CRPD, the need for the implementation of the convention, the need for legislative changes. He mentions legislative changes, and that the law will not bring about the paradigm shift. He asks how effective law can be in abuse prevention. But I think the question that Gábor raises is also about how effective law can be in preventing and relieving the social exclusion of persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities. So, my question is for you now, what do you think about the topic Gábor is addressing in this video? What are the non-legislative elements of the implementation of this convention, and how did Gábor use these tools to advance these implementations of the CRPD? Okay, so the non-legislative

changes, and how could Gábor manage to use these so called non-legislative elements of implementation. Amita, you started the first round. Dalma, would you like to start the second?

Dalma: I will be a little bit provocative. I think, when we talk about legislation and the questions Gábor raised, he underlined, without saying anything, the 2000 years of prejudice, what we are facing, and what people with disabilities are facing worldwide. He recognized clearly and we recognized clearly that the existing human rights law, or CRPD, historically failed to protect and promote the rights of people with disabilities, and with the new convention, of course, there is a possibility for the state to transform it into legislative, administrative, and juridical practices, but this adaptation is a very slow and complex process. What I find important to say is that each state has the belief that a particular prohibition should be implemented, and Gábor was very aware. He stated elsewhere, I quote: “social injustice and inequality can be effectively fought only if all those groups who face exclusion, inequalities, marginalisation and discrimination in society cooperate and fight together. If they do not learn how to do this in the national arenas, then the Convention will just become another nice piece of paper with a vision which will not be realised.” (The Equal Rights Trust, 2008, p. 91). I think with our joint work, like the Hungarian civil caucus and many other initiatives which we did together, we tried to implement the CRPD with the support of people with disabilities, human rights actors, the Ombudsman office, and many other friends who believed it was important. Including Bárczi of course, because the faculty believed that this was an important issue.

Sándor: Thanks a lot, Dalma. I think I would like to summarize; the importance of cooperation building is a key, right?

Dalma: Indeed, cooperation between people with disabilities and all actors. I think the lay people's responsibility he mentioned in the book, the lay people's responsibility, I think, several times in the book Gábor comes back to this issue because of the traditional way disabled people's organizations worked, by themselves. I think the CRPD convention and Ilona and Gyuri's presentation today clearly show that the world is a broken place, and we cannot do it by ourselves, we need to stick together, we need to stick together with the younger generation, experienced people, white and black, and disabled and abled, because otherwise it will be over. Not only because Harari says that artificial intelligence gave us the first time in history when a non-human would make decisions over life and death. I'm sorry I'm very enthusiastic, I'm an activist, so I'm acting. Thank you.

Sándor: You shouldn't be sorry for that, Dalma. So, you mentioned coalition building and togetherness. Thank you. Gyuri, would you like to continue?

György: I remember the time when we were in the discussions about the ratification of the CRPD, and also, when we lobbied for it in Hungary. He worked a lot with many of us, for instance, with the ÉFOÉSZ representatives at that time.

Sándor: The Hungarian umbrella organization for people with intellectual disabilities. Amita, what can you add to this?

Amita: I would sort of like to pitch in differently. When Gábor said: “I don’t think only law can do it”, he did not want to express that law had no meaning. Just that law was not to be seen as the goal. The law has to be seen as part of the process, and then when you continue to use it, is where the change will come. You need to look at the text and the spirit how to use the text to push the spirit, and how you use the spirit to push the text. He was kind of doing both. What he meant was: „let’s not romanticize law reform”. But, when you are becoming a spokesperson for a community that has been excluded, disqualified, and kept out by the law, you can’t possibly be saying that legal reform and legislation is not important. He was always saying that as well. He was also saying that we need to use the process of law reform to sensitize, and to continue to lobby. That’s fine, but we also have to create a joint understanding of our own. One of the big things that happens about the law, and that’s why one has to look at law reform with a lot of caution, is that the law is ultimately the instrument of the State. So if you are only going to emphasize the law, to that extent, you make the State that much more powerful. Do you know what it is that we want as people with disabilities? Don’t tell us what you want to give us as the government. We are telling you what we require. He used law reform and legislative reform in that manner, and I would want to look at the training in that matter. It was at each point in time he was conscious of the fact that this legislation, if made, was going to be implemented by a whole range of people. And if those people’s mindsets we don’t address, if we don’t want people with disabilities make fundamental questions...you can have legal capacity by law, but if the entire psychiatric community, psychiatric nurses, social workers believe that this body of people cannot make choices, if they’re kept in caged beds and that’s the only way they can be kept, if you do not address that mindset, just bringing in legal reform is not going to help.

And I think I go back to your first question then. He invested a lot into getting nurses to think differently, social workers to think differently, and into going and demonstrating it to them. This one doesn’t have the capability of making a choice. Alright, let’s test it out. He did this coffee–tea experiment where you give someone coffee. But have you asked them if they rather want tea? If you don’t, they can’t choose, we are just giving them what they are used to. He said okay, let me show it to you. So, he gave the person tea, and he gave the person coffee, and the person liked one thing and didn’t like one thing. If you don’t give a choice, how is he going to choose? That one demonstration for him was more important. It was likely going to bring legal capacity into the statute, but that legal capacity has to be implemented by people. Those people, their mindsets, how they think, if they are not going to work there and believe that just law reform is enough, that’s not enough. That’s what I think he was saying there. It was lots of layers of things, but I would not ever say that law reform was not important to him, he was smart enough to know how to use law reform and was not going to lay all his eggs in the law reform basket.

Sándor: That is definitely true. Gábor, of course, it was important to him to fight for law reform. This is why he had those meetings. I remember at the Ministry of Justice and...

Amita: There was another Gábor.

Sándor: Yes, exactly. The state secretary: dr. Gábor Gadó. That was definitely important to him, but as you all say, like lobbying, training, and all of these. I think Gábor's secret was, perhaps, there's the communicator in a very simple way. You mentioned the coffee-tea something. That you could formulate the questions, to the point whereby the same time, you just could not ignore to take side. That was the thing. Dalma, I don't know if you wanted to add something.

Dalma: I wanted to add something regarding what Amita said. For Gábor, the law was very important and it's coming out in the book. He was very proud that we did not only participate but that we managed collectively to have this convention, and he felt deeply about explaining the convention and transforming it into an everyday language. We wrote a human rights education book with Gábor (Gombos et al., 2010). The human rights you teach here, at Bárczi, is the explanation of the convention with practical exercises. I think it is a kind of a normal responsibility and he took all the time. His objective was very reasonable all the time, very fair, and because when he talks, it will be later if questioned, all of us were hanging on his words because of the context wise and the way he presented the content.

Sándor: Thank you so much. Time is running out. I need to pay attention to stay on time. We are getting to one of the most important issues of this panel discussion and this is that we want to launch a book today. We will project the cover page of the book and Gyuri just asked before the panel, "Do we have the book?" and I said no Gyuri, sorry, we don't. It was sent to the print house a month ago, and they have so much stuff to do because Christmas is approaching. I really wanted to have the book in my hand today to show you, but unfortunately, we didn't manage to, the good news is that I believe that we will have the book next week. The English version will be a printed one and the Hungarian version will be an e-version, but for now, this is the cover page and the back of the book which will be out soonish. This book is about Gábor's thoughts, about his views on human rights, physics, ethics, philosophy, the human mind, and so many important topics. I think my first important question is to Gyuri. Can you tell us how this book project started, because you are the one with good information to talk about that?

György: It was rather simple. Once I met Gábor and asked him if there were any videos on his presentations, or anything: systematically collected audiovisual material. He said, no. Some might be in Ireland, some might be in New York City, but no, he did not have them. Then I asked him why don't we show "Gábor's world to the world". He said, okay. So, we met 10 times. However, these may be called interviews, but these were not interviews in the strict sense of the word. As those were complex narratives. My role was "the holder of the mic", and it worked. I always picked him up at his house in Bécsi Street in the morning. It was in the 3rd district of Budapest. His house was called the "Göncz house" because Mr. Árpád Göncz and his family lived there before Mr. Göncz became the President of Hungarian Republic.

We went by car, we came to this building, to my room. He was always prepared, and he talked and talked. He was the one who did build up what he would speak about that certain day for about two or three hours and he was the one who timed himself. He could always talk without any notes, any presentation, or paper, without any ppt, anything. He always spoke by heart — and from heart, if you see what I

mean. Whenever I talked with him, whenever I invited him to this building, to our conferences, he always spoke by heart. And his speech was always something that could have been just simply printed as he pronounced the words one after the other. This is how Gábor “made” presentations. You also could follow it like a movie if you need to go. The only thing I don’t know but Amita will know, is that Gábor was a professor at her university, and my question is that when he had to complete a university course in English for the students, did he use anything or did it by heart as well. Thank you, that’s my question for you.

Amita: I mean, he wasn’t happy with PowerPoints. He didn’t think they were too good as a medium of communication, but what he did do for his classes, he used a lot of videos. He kind of used materials, some audio-visual materials which he felt were saying something to the students. He would show that and then proceed from there to discussions a lot. That was the methodology he employed for his lectures, but otherwise, largely he was not the PPT person.

Sándor: Okay, so he was not a PPT person. Another key word came back that was the wine. Not the divine, wine.

Amita: Because of the wine he became divine.

Gyuri: He went to the divine.

Sándor: Although we don’t have the book in our hands today physically, I had the book ready, even like a month ago, I sent the e-version to all of you. Unfortunately, Dalma just got it only a few days ago or a week ago, and thank you for your preparedness Dalma still, and I sent the e-version to our panelists. My question should be okay with you, and this is about whether there was any part in the book that particularly struck you or is there any matter in the book which you feel is particularly important. If you could share your thoughts on that?

Amita: Okay, you see, because after I met Gábor I have been doing a lot of professional writing with him. A lot of research together with his kind of stuff, one particular issue that has been quite weighing on his mind, he had been collecting materials, collecting stories, working on a back-and-forth basis, but had not really come down to writing about it because I would sort of like, agree with George that Gábor was a talker. You know, he was one of those people who did his thinking as he spoke, so speaking and speech was an important way for him to communicate his ideas. Those ideas should then be, if put into writing and transcribed and all of that, is exactly what he has done. I suppose I’m just coming to what it was that was bothering him for a long period was this relationship between creativity and madness. It was a very important concern in his life as to what it was. You know, is it madness that creates creativity or did creativity create madness, which of the two? You know, sort of things. Lots of major businesses canvassed, scientists, artists, he found so many people who had kind of made tremendous contribution in their specific fields, but were also diagnosed with madness at some point, some of them even died in asylums, one came out of recovery and that kind of thing. He has addressed that majorly in this book. In looking at Kurt Gödel, the mathematician, and the way in which Gödel spoke about



the theory of uncertainty, you can't really have something proven, it will always be further than. He gave the whole theory of uncertainty basically because he said you will never be able to find the ultimate proof, and in outlining that, Gödel goes further to then say that this is something which only Gödel could have found because he was a little mad, and because he was a little mad he wasn't really bound by the rules of mathematics or the paradigm which within mathematics was done. It was a kind of finding that could not have come from somebody who was within the system because the system would have so totally captured the individual that the individual would not know, that another way of looking at things is possible, but a person who is not captured by the system can come up with this sort of finding, and then he sort of goes further and says that because he talks in terms of mind maps and says each of us has mind maps under which we operate and Gödel wanted to come up with, when he was looking at the whole question of continuity theorem, the continuity discontinuity, that he wasn't able to find the ultimate proof for it and that what actually drew him mad. And isn't it ironic that he could not apply his own theory to what he was theorizing on, that you can't ultimately find that proof, it is of those things that will remain uncertain. I kind of find it fascinating and with that, I conclude. I find it fascinating in this particular one, that something he had been working on or wanted to work on all his life. He did do it. The other part of it is also which I find extremely fascinating is the way in which he has looked at human diversity and said that if just as there is human diversity, there is this human diversity in numbers and he picked up the mathematics of all of the disciplines to talk about this kind of diversity, to say from between point one to point two, how many other points are there in between and why are they not points? Why should you not be seeing them as also numbers and figures? Why do they not deserve respectability or that kind of recognition? I sort of said, only a human rights advocate who was also a physicist would have made this kind of connection, to say that you need to kind of somewhere look at this human diversity and give it that sort of recognition of being human and not say that there is only this one parametric of human who is human there's only one paradigm of being a number and hence you are a number. I found that for me that is what I would really say that each one needs to read that book, and it is kind of an essence of the sort of arguments that Gábor Gombos has been making through his life.

Sándor: What it does mean to me is shifting the paradigm. When you go beyond the current paradigm Gábor was very good at it. The convention is about shifting the paradigm, and this is how science recognizes. Who would like to continue, Gyuri, or Dalma? Dalma.

Dalma: First of all, thank you Gyuri and Ilona, and everybody who participated in this book. It is really something very special, not just for us, but for the upcoming generation who will work on this issue. I read the book which I received three days ago. I spent quite a lot of time reading and getting deeply into my belly or brain, according to Buddha, and I want to highlight chapter 13 which is called I'm on my way and I am on my way is for Gábor travels, so important for him. All this travel shaped his personality and through this travelling which he started at age 15, he described. He has this intellectual honest reflection in this chapter and quiet good distance for himself to see the world and saying that, he summarized the different countries,



different ideological background, he visited but he recognized that for all of us and men, it is not just us and them, as Pink Floyd said all of us we are ordinary man, but we united for the same subject. When you read later on he's visited India with Amita and he has this inner trouble inside out, what was raised earlier, the inside out issue, he talk about the white supremacy, how much it affected him and how challenging it was for him to get closer to his peers, but he worked very hard and I started crying when I was reading this chapter and he's really honest understanding of what the world is all about that we are sticking together and we need to stick together as I said earlier no matter what color or shape we are. In chapter 13, the last line was strong for me. He said: "During my travel, I recognize that I am a disability rights activist instead of being a psychiatric patient and rights advocate" I think it's so fundamental that identity and saying this as. I think many of us who are here in the room and listening to us have this enormous challenge of who we are. By positioning myself to the world and acting. The last sentence I want to say, this book is really sharing and passing Gábor through values, beliefs strategies, and tactics. It is of course the combined experience of many people who struggled to make the world more just. Thank you.

Sándor: Thank you, Dalma. I think you mentioned some keywords and I would add one more based on your words, and that would be travel, not only physically, but he traveled a lot in the world. Like physically, intellectually, or like what is a good word for that, spiritually, spiritual travels. So, travels, definitely. It is linked to what you have said, Amita, about the change, how you managed to understand things, to explain things, to go beyond always something. Gyuri?

György: Thank you. I would like to add something about the history of the book because it almost got lost. After the ten meetings with Gábor, I uploaded these MP3 files onto my Google drive and sent him the link. We discussed it, of course. These were his thoughts. We were speaking about whether he wanted to get it published. He said he had a teacher from secondary school who had a publishing company and tries to find him. So I sent to him the link where he could have downloaded all the files. However, I think he did not do so, it was not important for him. He made it but he didn't want to work or could not work with those files. But once, there was the day when Gábor died. It came to my mind that there is a part of him, that part is still somewhere here. Of course, it was not on my Google Drive anymore. One of our IT-Colleagues, Péter Kasza, found my old computer and after this we found all the files. That was the starting point of the book-project. After we started to work on this book, we got the support, ethical and moral support, from Bárczi, from the dean and Sanyi got financial support from the not-for profit company, where Gábor worked earlier, and we started to work on it. With Borbála Bányai and Veronika Kalász we worked a lot on this, but the heart of this work was Sándor Gurbai. The result is not only the English language book, the hard copy, but we came to some other results too. I think you wanted to speak about it a bit later, but this might be a good choice now.

Sándor: I understand it, Gyuri, I had another plan, but I can change that plan whenever you want me to do it. So now we will launch the website because we have created a new website. This is the www.gaborgombos.org, it is live. You can visit it. Currently we have it only in English. The Hungarian version will be available next



week, hopefully, today only in English or we have the Hungarian side, you will find a nice message please come back later. This is the website. We have buttons on the right top, yeah please, thank you. If you click on “Life”, you can read the curriculum vitae of Gábor, that’s one thing. The second is “Works”. If you click on the works, currently we have only video recordings here and publications, press appearances of Gábor. We definitely want to add all recordings if we manage to get the recordings. Currently, you only find five videos, but the plan is to collect more videos to ask for permission to be able to use them and put those videos on the website and that’s the same with journal articles, all the audio recordings, as I said. If we click on “Images”, then we also find collecting, like pictures of Gábor and uploading them here. We are reaching out for colleagues, everywhere in the world promised to send me some pictures and we will upload them here. If you go to “Images” and click on the “The story of the cover photo”, this is the photo which we are using for the book as well. You can see that this is a high-quality website and the book as well, at the level of really high-quality, but that’s true for the content as well. Not only is the design, but the content as well. If you scroll down a little bit, not that much. Thank you. This is Eddie Adams who made that wonderful photo of Gábor. If you scroll down a little bit, thank you. Here is the book in English. We will have like 250 copies of the book. If anybody wants to get the book, you should order it here. It’s free of charge, but we are asking you to make a little bit of a donation for us to be able to post the book. The Hungarian version will be available for free of charge again and you can download it from that website in an e-version. What else, this is the “Contact”. What is important here is that if you have photos, videos, anything of Gábor and you can share those with us, then we can upload them to this website, and this is how we can distribute Gábor’s legacy. Also, if you have stories of Gábor, you can send them to us because we have the plan to create a space on the website to share stories of Gábor. If you click on the Hungarian version, just to show you, it is a nice title and message perhaps there for everybody. Thank you, Viki, and if you can project Gábor’s message. Thank you. I need to check the time. I just want to spend a few minutes on this slide because Gábor used an email signature, some quotes, when he sent an email. We said today that communication was important to Gábor when he delivered training sessions and having lunch and having discussions, like communicating. Through his emails also he was communicating, everyone is communicating through their emails, but he was always using these quotes. I will just read them out. “So long as the superstition that men should obey unjust laws exist, so long will their slavery exist. And a passive resister alone can remove such a superstition.” – that’s from Gandhi. And the second one “We should never forget that everything that Adolf Hitler did in Germany was “legal” and everything the Hungarian freedom fighters did in Hungary was “illegal” that’s from Martin Luther King, Jr. We have a few minutes left. My question to you, and I’m going to ask you to try to answer briefly, in one minute perhaps, and then we will have time for questions. Of course, you can add something to that. My question is what do you think what Gábor, what was the sort of message he wanted to send with this email signature? That’s the question. What was his intention in putting that in his emails? Thank you, Dalma, briefly.

Dalma: I will not be brief, but I will be honest. It was very important when Sándor called me that I should jump in on behalf of our lovely Indian colleagues to come

here. I took out Gábor's files, I have huge files, because we worked together for many years on many, many different topics, and these signatures started to appear when the INDIC started. Before that, he never used this signature. I think this was the way he screamed at the world, as Edward Munch, many of you know this picture. His way of screaming at us and I called him, and he said, "I want to scream." I said, okay, come over and let's have a whiskey and we had a lot of whiskey that night and he stuck this signature the rest of his life and in my opinion his message was we should refuse cooperation with injustice. My thought was that apathy in the face of injustice, in the face of violence. My thought was when I was reading this sentence the enemy is the system that casts people in oppressive roles, and my thought was in my belief that Gábor message served as an inspiration for those contemplating actions today. Sorry, I am very emotional about this, because it was so painful to see him suffer over this decision.

Amita: I don't think he did anything without reason. Possibly this one was his way of alerting people to the obvious.

György: I will be brief as well. I think Dalma is right, however, I really can't add too much to this, sorry about that.

Sándor: But this is good, because now we can ask you to ask questions to our panelists. We can take questions from the floor. Please raise your hand if you have any questions. Please try to be brief so that our panelists can take time to answer your questions. Any questions? Okay I stand up to be able to see.

György: Comments are welcome as well.

Q: I'm Krisztina Kovács. My question is that you mentioned that he was a man of speech rather than a man of writing or publishing. How do you think that his heritage can be served for today's students for people with disabilities in the future?

Amita: I think he has written so much, thankfully the fact that he was a man of speech was largely recorded. I think it would become quite how much we disseminate of it, and the other is I suppose because he was a teacher, it would be interesting to also get in touch with his students to see what kind of legacy he has left there. These are two things that I would want to add to your side.

György: I agree with what Amita said. The book, the hard copy is in English and the website is bilingual.

Dalma: And I believe that he will be with us until we keep the work, the same way as Gábor did. I mean that we share, we stick together. I'm very scared that the Disability Caucus dies in Hungary and maybe there will be a time when this could be again coming alive. We will be Bárczi and other initiatives could go together and keep the whole base communication, which Gábor was very strong on. I think I learned from him the legacy of that the whole base communication. He was and the burning commitment, the burning commitment and the desire for change, and the desire to change, it must be in all of us, especially for those who are sitting here, and if you do this with the committee today, you go in Gábor's footsteps, and this is a very



important message for me which teach me and I said earlier he believed in fairness and I believe in fairness and we should not be afraid to state the obvious but we should say it simply, as Gábor said, very simple words but very down to the point. The Gábor legacy that we underline often to me is that truly inclusive equality is so important. The truly inclusive equality I want to emphasize, not inclusion and equality separate, but he underlined it truly, here is Gábor. Thank you, Gábor.

Amita: I just want to add for a second. I think he was an iconic survivor. One of the real iconic survivors and his story will inspire. It didn't matter whether he wrote or not, but I think his story will be the cause of inspiration. He will be somebody who to that extent both in his own country and everywhere else might just be.

Sándor: Thank you so much, Amita. Yes, more questions in the meantime? Please, raise your hand if you have. Two. Can we start with Stephen and then Anikó, and we could take these two together and then you can ask us, thank you.

Q: Just a short question. Dalma, you mentioned that you would love to see the caucus come back here in Hungary, and I heard the power of the CRPD negotiations as well. Why do you think we don't have those connections now? What can we do now to stand together and to strengthen these things together again? Thank you.

Q: Looking at the current development of the disability rights at the global level, what do you think would Gábor's priorities now be? What would his works focus be today? How could we jointly advance his priorities in Gábor's name and support people with disabilities?

Sándor: Thank you for these questions. Can we start with you Dalma?

Dalma: Regarding the caucus, I think the disability organization and activists should stick together and the work is not done despite that this convention was signed and ratified quite a long time ago. But most of the time when you are working with activists, you believe that you start the preparation, do the job, such as we did with the group and we stick together and follow-up and monitor. I think we should have one organization and one coordinator who really calls for cooperation with disabled people's organizations, the Ombudsman office, human rights organization, and institutions, such as Bárczi and ELTE in order to stick together and speak in one voice. Because I think we are missing the disharmonisation of today, before that the very segregated, old-fashioned system, I think we can see clearly in Hungary. Please don't take my opinion personally, because the last ten years or maybe eight years I have not worked in the field of disability, but I can see these very segregated activities. The "nothing about us without us" principle is just kind of proverb and not the reality, in my opinion. It is an obligation for all of us. If the community wants to do it, I'm very happy to come to help but we need to stick together again and forever.

Amita: I think he would have gone back to transcripts and in some ways, I think it would be my answer to what was being said, because whatever we did during the CRPD and before, primarily came from a very deep understanding of the exclusion, discrimination, disqualification that we have faced, and it was that denial and that experience of oppression which kind of informed his advocacy. Getting off the CRPD

for a little while deluded people into believing that you had conquered the world. He would have gone back to demonstrate exactly where it had not happened, and consequently pieced it together again, from down the bottom up. There is no shortcut to change.

Dalma: I think due to his enormous openness and interest in the world, of what is going on, and his reflection. I think he would definitely be worried about artificial intelligence and disability for sure. As Gerald Quinn, two years ago, he submitted a document to the United Nations on artificial intelligence and disability. I can warmly recommend all of you who are sitting here and want to stick together, to see what is going on in the field, because he was in mathematics also and had a very personal interest probably, but I agree with Amita the activity would have been his answer.

Sándor: Thank you so much actually, we don't have time now for more questions, but I would like to just mention again, that it was mentioned in the beginning that first I reached out to Gerald Quinn, and he agreed to be on this panel. Gerald Quinn, I don't have to say anything about him, everyone knows him. He got sick, and this is why he couldn't come. We also invited Bhargavi V. Davar, a really great advocate from India, who knows Gábor very well. Unfortunately, she got sick, so she couldn't come¹. We are thankful again, and grateful to Amita, Dalma, and Gyuri for answering questions, sharing memories and just being with us here today. Thank you, all of you, for being here with us and being with here during this panel discussion. What did I think was important? Those keywords, which we tried to identify during the panel and I'm sure that you can find those on these nice drawings and the kind of minutes of the panel discussion. So, thank you to all, and thank you.

We would like to thank Enikő Biró for transcribing the panel recording.

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¹ With this panel discussion we also pay tribute to our respected colleague Bhargavi V. Davar who unfortunately passed away in 2024.