

In Memoriam: ICN remembers former President Kirsten Stallknecht

Geneva, Switzerland, 5 May 2021 – The International Council of Nurses (ICN) sadly announces the passing of Kirsten Stallknecht, former ICN President (1997-2001), Second Vice President (1985-1989) and member of the ICN Board of Directors (1981-1985).

Annette Kennedy, ICN President said: “It is with great sadness that we bid farewell to Kirsten Stallknecht. A true inspiration to nurses around the world, Kirsten was known as a formidable force in nursing and public life, not only in her native Denmark but throughout Europe and internationally.”

Mrs Stallknecht was elected ICN President in 1997 at the 21st ICN Congress in Vancouver Canada, where she selected the watchword “humanity”. During her tenure she led nurses’ condemnation of lethal injections and torture, advocating that health professions join together to move governments to stop such practices. She initiated many programmes and partnerships to help nurses and their associations hard hit by war, financial difficulties and catastrophes and those in lower income countries. Among her many achievements during her term as President, the revision of the ICN Code of Ethics for Nurses, expansion of ICN’s International Classification of Nursing Practice, and development of the ICN Advanced Practice Network continue to be widely used today.



Throughout her career, Kirsten Stallknecht dedicated more than 50 years to improving working conditions for nurses. At ICN, she led programmes to provide nurses with negotiating skills in regions worldwide and lobbied for the ILO Convention on Nursing Personnel, for maternity protection, socio-economic welfare, career mobility, migration, occupational health and policies on violence against nurses.

An inspiration to many nurses around the world, her enthusiasm and passion for her work has encouraged nurses to strive for excellence in nursing. In 1999, Mrs Stallknecht presided over the ICN centennial celebrations in 1999 where colleagues fondly remember her walking into Westminster Abbey holding the Nightingale lamp and dancing at the Royal Albert Hall during the Opening Ceremony.

Mrs Stallknecht served as President of the Danish Nurses Organisation for 28 years (1968-1996), the Nordic Nurses Federation (1989-95) and the European Federation of Nurses Associations (1991-1995). In 2001, she was named Commander of Dannebrog by Queen Margrethe II of Denmark for spearheading numerous beneficial programmes for Danish and Nordic nurses that serve as models for other nurses’ organisations. In 2004 she received the CGFNS International Distinguished Leadership Award, and in 2013 she was awarded ICN’s Christiane Reimann Prize, nursing’s most prestigious international award.