



WORLD FEDERATION OF THE DEAF
Legal Seat – Helsinki, Finland

WORLD FEDERATION OF THE DEAF

An International Non-Governmental Organisation in official liaison with ECOSOC, UNESCO, ILO, WHO and the Council of Europe. WFD was established in Rome in 1951.

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WFD ROLE IN ORDINARY MEMBER CONFLICTS

1. BACKGROUND - [CLICK HERE FOR INTERNATIONAL SIGN](#)

The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) is an international human rights organisation whose vision is to achieve human rights for deaf people, including recognition of sign language in all aspects of life. One of the key ways towards the realisation of these rights is to support WFD Ordinary Members (national associations of the deaf) and WFD Regional Secretariats in strengthening their capacity to both understand and advocate for deaf people's rights nationally and regionally.

The WFD currently has more than 130 Ordinary Members. Only one Ordinary Member is permitted per country although in extraordinary circumstances, the WFD Board may make an exception to this rule.¹

According to the WFD Statutes article 11.1: *“Any recognised or registered national organisation of the deaf, with legal status, and that has an established position in its country, its majority of members are deaf persons, and its vision and aims similar to those of the WFD, may apply for Ordinary Member (OM) status.”*

In order to become an Ordinary Member of the WFD, the association applying needs to provide evidence that it complies with the aforementioned point. It should be noted that if the status of a deaf association changes significantly, this could also affect its membership of the WFD. Such examples include:

- if an association no longer has a majority of deaf persons on the Board;
- if an association's vision and mission no longer align with those of the WFD; and/or
- an association may become inactive or ineffective with another one clearly becoming the leading organisation for deaf people.

In each of the above situations, evidence of inactivity/ineffectiveness would need to be produced.

This document also aims to provide guidance on the WFD position in situations involving conflict in a particular country in which a national association is implicated in line with the WFD Statutes article 11.4².

2. GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE WFD - [CLICK HERE FOR INTERNATIONAL SIGN](#)

- The work of WFD is guided by its Vision, Mission, Values and Guiding Principles, approved and endorsed by its Ordinary Members at the XIX WFD General Assembly in 2015 (Istanbul, Turkey).
- The WFD strongly strives for leadership of deaf people in all spheres of life.
- The WFD promotes the principles of democracy, equality, co-operation and partnership in all its work and expects that its members pay full attention to these values.
- This is recognised in the WFD Statutes and WFD Internal Rules, which state that only a national organisation of deaf people will be admitted as an Ordinary Member of WFD, with equal voting rights to every other Ordinary Member.

¹ WFD Statutes article 11.3: Ordinary Membership shall be limited to one national organisation of the deaf in each country. The WFD Board shall have the authority to approve exceptions to this Statute, for extraordinary circumstances.

² WFD Statutes article 11.4: If two or more national organisations of the deaf state that they represent deaf people in a country, the WFD Board shall use “WFD Role in Ordinary Member Conflicts” to determine which of the national organisations has the widest recognition among the deaf population in that country.

3. CRITERIA TO BECOME AN ORDINARY MEMBER - [CLICK HERE FOR INTERNATIONAL SIGN](#)

Deaf associations which apply to become an Ordinary Member of WFD need to fulfil the following criteria:

1. Commit to abide by the Vision, Mission and Aims of the WFD;
2. Be registered in the country;
3. Work on a national peak body level (as opposed to only at local level);
4. Be based in a country which is one of the United Nations' member states;
5. Be democratically led: hold General Meetings with elections for the executive positions; and
6. Be a deaf-led organisation (in which the majority of executive positions are held by deaf people).

If a deaf association fulfils these criteria, it is eligible to become an Ordinary Member of the WFD, following decision and approval by the WFD Board.

Once approved, the Ordinary Member has the following responsibilities³:

1. Pay annual membership fees to the WFD
2. Inform WFD of any changes in the Ordinary Member's statutes or to the Ordinary Member's leadership
3. Abide by the WFD Vision, Mission and Aims, actively pursue work on a national level in co-operation with and in support of local and regional branches, hold regular meetings and convene them democratically, respect the principle of deaf leadership and function according to the WFD Statutes.

If the aforementioned duties and responsibilities are not fulfilled, the WFD may intervene and investigate.

4. SITUATIONS WHERE ORDINARY MEMBER CONFLICTS ARISE - [CLICK HERE FOR INTERNATIONAL SIGN](#)

The WFD Board will only intervene in conflicts which have direct ramifications for WFD or which have negative impacts on the wider Deaf Community at a national level and not in disputes between individuals. There are a range of situations in which the WFD may become involved in conflicts or disputes where at least one national deaf association is involved, including, but not limited to the following situations:

- Two or more competing national level deaf associations which both wish to become WFD Ordinary members and the WFD is unable to decide which one is entitled to be recognised as the Ordinary Member;
- One national deaf association refuses to agree to mutual co-operation with another national deaf association in the same country;
- Activities or behaviour by an Associate Member is detrimental to the Ordinary Member;
- Deaf people at the community level refuse to recognise a national deaf association as their representative organisation; and/or
- The management of a national deaf association have internal leadership and conflicts thereby creating confusion for deaf people at the community level.

5. POSTION OF WFD IN CASE OF CONFLICT - [CLICK HERE FOR INTERNATIONAL SIGN](#)

The WFD Board will always act impartially with any perspective expressed based on evidence. This will be achieved by appointing a neutral facilitator who will undertake an investigation, having regard for cultural sensitivities at the national level.

The recommendations of the final report and any advice offered will not be prescriptive although the national association which has requested WFD'S intervention will be strongly encouraged to consider the recommendations of the final report seriously.

³ WFD Statutes Articles 11.5-11.9

6. INVOLVEMENT OF WFD IN CASE OF CONFLICT - [CLICK HERE FOR INTERNATIONAL SIGN](#)

The WFD Board will only intervene in a conflict or dispute at the written request of a national organisation of deaf people or of a WFD Regional Secretariat. Rare exceptions to this may be made in cases where the WFD receives significant written evidence that the Deaf Association is in conflict with the WFD's criteria applicable to Ordinary Members.

Initial action by WFD Board

1. In the first instance, when applicable, the WFD will encourage the parties in conflict to meet and discuss the issues of concern with the intention that it be resolved without external intervention.
2. If this is not successful, a neutral facilitator plus one representative from the WFD Regional Secretariat, if there is one, will be selected by the WFD Board to officially represent the WFD in negotiating resolution of the conflict.
3. The WFD Board will provide the facilitator with the background to the situation including any written materials received from the national organisation/s and other stakeholders, outline the facilitator's role and associated expectations and answer questions of the facilitator.

Note: Travel, accommodation and meal expenses and any costs associated with sign language interpreting services will be borne by the parties, unless otherwise decided by the WFD Board.

Proposed plan of action by the facilitator

1. *First phase of investigation:*

- Meet with each of the leaders of the parties separately to understand the perspectives of each party
- Interview other relevant stakeholders if available and as appropriate
- Analyse the underlying philosophy and position of the parties involved in the conflict with reference to the WFD framework. This includes considering the Statutes of the association/s and compliance and any other relevant documentation such as Strategic Plans and their implementation
- Consider the effects of the conflict on the national Deaf Community and which association has acted in the best interests of deaf people to date and would most likely do so in the future

2. *Second phase of investigation:*

- Draft a report outlining findings of investigation and recommendations for presentation to the WFD Board. Suggested content of report should include:
 - *Background to the conflict*
 - *Action taken by WFD*
 - *Actions implemented by the facilitator*
 - *Outcome of investigations*
 - *Recommendations*

3. *Final phase of investigation:*

- The WFD Board will finalise the report and will share it with the parties to the conflict and the WFD Regional Secretariat if applicable.

7. CONCLUSION - [CLICK HERE FOR INTERNATIONAL SIGN](#)

The report by the facilitator is designed to provide a transparent record of the WFD's role in endeavouring to resolve a conflict involving a national deaf association/s.

The WFD Board will decide the way forward based on the recommendations in the final report, including but not limited to making proposals for consideration at the WFD General Assembly.

The way forward in the country affected will ultimately be at the discretion of the national deaf organisation(s) although with the intention that they take account of the final report, particularly the recommendations and act accordingly.