



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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Civil Society Forum Panel presentation by Eeva Tupi, World Federation of the Deaf on 11 June 2018

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) is a non-governmental organisation representing approximately 70 million deaf people. The WFD has national associations of the deaf in 135 countries as ordinary members. I am honoured to represent our organisation here today to share examples on how deaf people in different parts of the world continue being marginalised from the CRPD implementation and recommendations for changing this situation.

In 2013-2017 the WFD received project funding to provide training workshops to eight national associations of the deaf in the Global South prior to cross-disability workshops to prepare parallel reports to the CRPD Committee. In these trainings deaf leaders were given opportunity to learn about CRPD through sign language trained by a deaf trainer. These workshops were safe spaces where deaf people could freely reflect their experiences in the light of the CRPD implementation at the national level. In some cases, it was the first time ever that deaf leaders were taught by a deaf person, which was an empowering experience for them.

With the knowledge built from the deaf-led workshop deaf leaders were able to participate more effectively in cross-disability workshops to provide input for CRPD parallel reports. Without having knowledge about human rights, the CRPD and its reporting system deaf leaders would easily be passive participants. This is a challenging issue for non-deaf people to notice. The provision of professional sign language interpretation is not necessarily sufficient because deaf leaders might not have previous knowledge about CRPD issues. While being physically in the room for meetings or workshops with the provision of professional sign language interpreters, deaf leaders might actually be mentally absent trying to understand what is being discussed without knowing which human rights they have and how to contribute to the reporting process. When being asked “do you understand?” it is sometimes easy to say “yes” because of feeling embarrassed or not wanting to burden people by asking extra questions. It is somewhat invisible barrier of not having common language, which can give non-deaf people false assumption that deaf people would be equal participants. In safe deaf space with deaf trainer it is more convenient for deaf leaders to ask for clarifications. Deaf-only workshops would equip deaf leaders with more skills and confidence to meaningfully participate in cross-disability workshops.

Ideally, the WFD would like to see all countries providing human rights training by deaf trainers to support the participation of deaf people in the CRPD implementation. Without having required skills it is challenging to make changes. Unfortunately the WFD has not seen many initiatives to provide CRPD training in sign language funded by national governments. The WFD continues receiving requests from several countries to conduct CRPD workshops to which WFD does not currently have financial resources to contribute. The WFD encourages all governments to consider to provide financial support for training to be led by deaf trainers to empower your deaf communities.

The current situation of limited capacity of deaf people to participate in many countries is related to the education system, which continues not being accessible for deaf people. Until education is provided through the medium of sign language and in sign language environment, deaf people cannot be considered as equal in

terms of education. The WFD has recently published a position paper on what inclusive education means for deaf people and how it should be implemented. The paper is available at our website. With the improvement of education system, deaf leaders would become more equipped with knowledge about their community, government, human rights and cooperation.

In addition to the limited capacity to participate in the CRPD implementation, the representation role continues being challenging in several countries. In line with the CRPD, it is deaf people themselves who must be consulted to ensure that no one is left behind. In this consultation it is very important to respect the use of national sign languages.

I would like to share some examples from our member organisations. In one country, organisations for persons with disabilities, charities and service providers are considered representing deaf community. When other organisations have traditionally had close relationship with government and other stakeholders, it is not easy for deaf leaders of national associations of the deaf to receive information and be given priority in consultation. It is not acceptable to put different organisations working with deaf people into same line with national associations of the deaf. Needless to say, many service providers and charities are not led by deaf people themselves.

In another country, there is no professional sign language interpreter training program, accreditation or funding available. Under these circumstances it is very hard for our member organisation to participate in the CRPD implementation when government and even other DPOs ask them to send a hearing representative or a deaf representative who uses spoken language instead of a deaf representative using sign language because no one is paying for sign language interpreter. In this example deaf leaders are left behind because of the lack of funding for sign language interpretation. It is challenging to think how deaf people can be empowered and become equal participants with other DPOs in the CRPD implementation if they are not given opportunity to represent through their own language. Giving preference for deaf people who use spoken language or hearing representatives should not be accepted. It is important that all of us, including government and DPO representatives, take measures to ask deaf people themselves to become involved and find solution on how to pay for professional sign language interpretation in consultations, meetings and other events.

Based on examples that I shared you may understand that until education system become truly accessible for deaf people through the sign language and government has taken measures to establish professional sign language interpreter system in close collaboration with national association of the deaf, it is not possible to consider deaf people having equal opportunity to participate in the CRPD implementation or even in society at large. It is important to see the whole system affecting lives of deaf people, not only making CRPD-related meetings accessible.

In sum, WFD's main messages are: 1. Provide funding and opportunity for deaf leaders to become trained in CRPD issues through sign language by deaf trainers 2. Make sure that deaf leaders of national associations of the deaf are given priority in consultation on matters concerning lives of deaf people.

Thank you.

About the World Federation of the Deaf

The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) is an international non-governmental organisation representing and promoting approximately 70 million deaf people's human rights worldwide. The WFD is a federation of deaf organisations from 135 nations; its mission is to promote the human rights of deaf people and full, quality and equal access to all spheres of life, including self-determination, sign language, education, employment and community life. WFD has a consultative status in the United Nations and is a founding member of International Disability Alliance (IDA). (www.wfdeaf.org) Email: info@wfd.fi