



**WORLD FEDERATION  
OF THE DEAF**



**INTERNATIONAL DAY  
OF SIGN LANGUAGES**



**INTERNATIONAL WEEK  
OF THE DEAF**

## **Celebrate International Week of the Deaf 2020! #IWDeaf**

The International Week of the Deaf (IWD) is an initiative of the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) and was first launched in 1958 in Rome, Italy. It is celebrated annually by the global Deaf Community during the last full week of September to commemorate the same month the first World Congress of the WFD was held. The International Week of the Deaf is celebrated through various activities by Deaf Communities all around the world. These activities and events welcome the participation of all members of deaf communities, which include families of deaf people, professional and accredited sign language interpreters, peers, as well as the involvement of various stakeholders such as national governments, national and international human rights organizations, and Organisations of Persons with Disabilities.

The theme of the 2020 International Week of the Deaf will be “Reaffirming Deaf People’s Human Rights” This year, we want all stakeholders to unite in endorsement of the need to secure and promote the human rights of deaf people! Affirm your support for full human rights for all deaf people by signing the WFD Charter on Sign Language Rights for All.

As part of our celebration, we will have daily themes every day this week.

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## Daily themes

### **21 September 2020- Sign Languages**

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National sign languages are the natural languages of deaf people.

With more than 200 different sign languages used around the globe, national sign languages are the native languages of more than 70 million deaf people worldwide. They are also the native languages of children from deaf-parented families and are also used by millions of others around the world who are part of vibrant national sign language communities. National sign languages are fully-fledged languages with the same linguistic properties as spoken languages. National sign languages connect deaf people to Deaf Communities. Through the use of national sign languages, deaf people share a common culture and identity.

For this International Week of the Deaf, let's highlight the richness of sign languages and their equal status with spoken languages. The promotion of national sign languages and deaf culture strengthens multilingualism and is a means of encouraging, protecting and preserving the diversity of languages and cultures globally. Deaf Communities are diverse and intersectional, with deaf people are found among all cultural, linguistic, and ethnic minorities.

At the same time, let's recognise the discrimination still faced by deaf people around the world regarding their access to and use of their preferred languages, their national sign languages. And deaf people from traditionally marginalized populations face intersectional obstacles to their use of sign languages. Let's work together to ensure the right to use sign languages is extended to all peoples around the world.

*What does equality for sign languages mean? Read the [Charter on Sign Language Rights for All](#), endorse and come back tomorrow to learn more.*

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## **22 September 2020- Inclusive Sign Language Environments**

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National sign languages secure the full inclusion of deaf people in their societies!

This inclusion starts at an early age with bilingual education for deaf learners in national sign languages and national written languages with deaf peers, following a curriculum that maximises the full learning potential of deaf children taught by teachers fluent in the national sign language. Quality and inclusive education is crucial to empower and enable deaf people to become active contributors in their societies and communities.

This inclusion through sign language must take place not only in schools but also in the family home. Therefore, it is of paramount importance that governments provide families of deaf children with free instruction in their national sign languages throughout the child's schooling. The acquisition of a sign language from an early age is crucial to develop the literacy and cognitive capacities of deaf children. For deaf people to be able to realize their self-determination in accessible societies, it is crucial that a wide range of services are available directly in national sign languages. These include, among others, health services, social services, media, workforce, education services, and government services.

*Bilingual inclusive education in the national sign language and national spoken language is crucial to ensure our inclusion in society. Highlight the need for sign language education to your leaders. Find out more tomorrow with the Global Leaders Challenge ! But first, endorse our [Charter](#) on Sign Language Rights for All.*

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## **23 September 2020- International Day of Sign Languages- Sign Languages Are for Everyone !**

**#IDSignLanguages #SignLanguagesForEveryone**

The International Day of Sign Languages is a unique opportunity to support and protect the linguistic identity and cultural diversity of all deaf people and other sign language users. This celebration arises from the Resolution A/RES/72/161 of the United Nations adopted in 2017, which recognizes the 23rd of September as the International Day of Sign Languages.

The WFD is proud to announce a Global Leaders Challenge ! to be achieved during the 2020 International Day of Sign Languages. This challenge aims to promote the use of national sign languages by national and global leaders in partnership with their national associations of deaf people.

Your country leaders - might they be government officials, members of parliaments, members of city council - should sign in your national sign language “(name of your national sign language) is for Everyone! ”

For example:

“Ghanan Sign Language is for Everyone!”

”La Langue des Signes Belge Francophone est pour tous!”

The Global Leaders Challenge is an opportunity for national associations of deaf people to establish and maintain sustainable collaborations with their national leaders through the use of their national sign languages.

National associations of deaf people can contact their leaders and ask them to make a video in their national sign language, with their technical support. The WFD will collect all the videos to be released on their website and social media channels during the International Day of Sign Languages. In addition, the National Association of the Deaf will advocate for their National TV Broadcast channels to release the videos of national leaders at peak hours.

See our [Global Leaders Challenge](#) !

*What can National Associations of the Deaf do to ensure the achievement of their human rights? Endorsing our Charter on Sign Language Rights for All and advocating for the legal recognition of their national sign language! Let's find out tomorrow the importance laying behind the legal recognition of sign languages !*

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## **24 September 2020- The Legal Recognition of National Sign Languages**

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Uganda was the first country in the world to legally recognise its national sign language in 1995. Since then, only approximately 50 countries have formally granted their national sign languages an equal status to their national spoken language(s). This is less than 25% of the United Nations 193 Member States.

National sign language recognition campaigns have been the core advocacy work of numerous National Associations of the Deaf. Those associations have worked in partnership with deaf activists and the academic community with the common goal of reaching the legal recognition of their national sign languages!

National sign languages are fully-fledged languages with the same linguistic properties as spoken languages. They deserve full recognition through legislation as minority languages of their country of origin with an equal status to the spoken languages used in that country.

*Why is it important to grant legal recognition to national sign language(s)?*

The legal recognition of national sign languages is the first step in the path toward achieving human rights for deaf people. This recognition can give instrumental rights to deaf people and compel obligations from national governments.

Through sign language legislation, deaf people can be entitled to claim access to all areas of life in their national sign language and benefit from equal opportunities. Therefore, governments have the legal obligation to ensure recognition as the first step to the inclusion of deaf people and sign languages into their societies.

Sign language legislation can enable the realization of the most fundamental rights of deaf people, the rights to access all areas of society on an equal footing with others, through sign language.

*Sign language legislation enables deaf people to benefit from equal opportunities in all areas of life. Let's meet tomorrow to find out what that means in practice! However, if you haven't yet endorsed our [Charter](#) on Sign Language Rights for All, please do so today.*

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## **25 September 2020- Equal Opportunities for All Deaf People**

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An inclusive employment environment in sign language is the cornerstone that enables deaf people to thrive and reach their full potential in order to maximise their participation and contribution to society. This inclusion and participation in society is underpinned by government-funded qualified and accredited sign languages interpreters, as well as multilingual workplaces which use national sign languages. Therefore, sign language training programs need to be established and developed with the leadership of deaf people through their representative organisations.

*Government-funded sign language interpreting services must be available for deaf people in all areas of life.*

Equal opportunities for all deaf people means for all underrepresented groups of deaf people as well, including deaf women. Deaf women and girls are under-represented and are at risk of facing intersectional discrimination due to their gender, disability and linguistic minority status.

Therefore, everyone - including representative organisations of deaf people - must pay attention to the specific situation of deaf women and implement precise measures to safeguard gender equality, diversity and equal participation in all decision-making processes in their society and within their organisations.

This year's Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the dire lack of access of deaf people to life-saving public health information in their national sign languages. Furthermore, sexual and reproductive health care, as well as health prevention programmes including psychiatric care and psychotherapy must be accessible to deaf people in their national sign languages. Access to health services is not only about Deaf Communities. This access ensures the health of all communities.

*Equal opportunity for all means all services must be designed with the leadership of deaf people through their representative organisations. What does that mean? Let's find out by endorsing the [Charter on Sign Language Rights for All](#) and following the next topic tomorrow.*

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## **26 September 2020- Deaf Leadership**

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The motto of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) is “*Nothing about us without us*”. It means that any initiative undertaken in favour of deaf people must be done in close consultation with them through their representative organisations at every stage. Knowledge empowers deaf people and allows them to be agents of change in their societies.

Deaf people know better than anyone what we need and how to achieve our goals. Deaf people have organized and advocated for our rights for over two centuries, and Deaf Communities throughout the world are part of an expansive interlocking network of local, regional, national and global organisations which seek to promote human rights through sign languages. The WFD is the world’s largest international uni-disability association with 125 member countries, consisting of representative national associations of deaf people.

This network of deaf-led organisations across the globe shows the importance of deaf organisations leading the way for equal access for all. It is important to provide sufficient funding, capacity building, and empowerment to deaf organisations to ensure they are able to exercise their leadership and advisory roles. These organisations must promote inclusive and intersectional values, ensuring the views of all members of our diverse deaf communities are part of our advocacy work.

Yet, to be able to receive adequate and meaningful funding in accordance with the reality of the situation faced by deaf people, it is necessary to provide quality, harmonised and reliable data on deaf people disaggregated by gender, age, education, sign language proficiency, disability and employment. It is only through sign languages that deaf people are able to stand firm and achieve their human rights.

*The right to sign language is the most fundamental human right of the deaf people. What are human rights? How can sign languages be a part of human rights? Read the Charter on Sign Language Rights for All, endorse it and have a look at tomorrow’s final day of the 2020 International Week of the Deaf.*

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## **27 September 2020- I sign for Human Rights!**

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Human rights are a set of interlinked and inalienable rights inherent to every human being, whatever their nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, disability, religion, culture or language. All human beings have the right to exercise their human rights without discrimination.

Human rights are civil (right to life), political (right to participate in society), economic (right to work), social (right to be educated), cultural (right to belong to a cultural minority and to use sign languages) and collective (right to development and self-determination) with the leading principles of equality and non-discrimination.

Those rights are indivisible and interdependent. Meaning, it is not possible to isolate only a few rights among the entire set of human rights. The improvement of one right improves the other rights. Likewise, the deprivation of one right adversely affects the others.

*How can we apply that to deaf people and their right to their national sign languages?*

Sign languages are the only languages deaf people can use effortlessly and they are the only way for the deaf people to participate and be fully included in their communities. The right to sign language and to belong to a Deaf Community is a cultural human right.

The right to sign language is also linked to their social and economical right to receive quality education in their national sign language and to work in an inclusive environment. The provision of qualified and accredited sign language interpretation is the only way to ensure the equality and non-discrimination of deaf people in their right to access all spheres of society.

Recognising the right of deaf people to use their national sign language is to ensure the fulfilment of these interlinked human rights. This can be achieved via the promotion of national sign languages as a part of national societies. Deaf people should be able to access direct services in all areas of life in their national sign languages or, when direct language access is not possible, via government-funded qualified and accredited sign language interpretation services. Equality and non-discrimination are fundamental principles in deaf people's access to society.

*Do you agree all deaf people deserve equal opportunities and inclusion in society as part of their human rights? Do you support the use, promotion and dissemination of your national sign languages? Sign for Human Rights. Sign the [Charter](#) on Sign Language Rights for All.*

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