



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.

PO Box 65, 00401 Helsinki, FINLAND

www.wfdeaf.org

President

COLIN ALLEN

Email: info@wfd.fi

International Sign version is available at <https://vimeo.com/178963838>

WFD Statement delivered by Kasper Bergmann, Human Rights Officer at the opening of the 16th session of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 15 August 2016

Thank you, Members of the Committee. My name is Kasper Bergmann and I work as a Human Rights Officer at the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD). Our organisation has member organisations in 132 countries and is a founding member of the International Disability Alliance (IDA).

A key issue for the WFD is protecting and promoting the right to education - in particular access to education in sign languages. The WFD is finalising a Position Paper on the Language Rights of Deaf Children. This is especially important given the confusion that often surrounds the interpretation of Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

The WFD respects the advocacy of organisations of peoples with disabilities in their advocacy for full inclusion in local schools for their constituencies. The CRPD makes clear that no mainstream school may exclude a deaf child from attending if this is his or her choice. However, Article 24 should *not* be misread as mandating this as the only modality of education for all deaf children. The intent of the drafters of the CRPD was to allow *choice* in education for deaf children – whichever way will best maximise outcomes for the individual child. This is true for deaf, deaf-blind, and blind children. The drafters of the CRPD recognised these groups differ from other children with disabilities and should have the option to be educated in a variety of learning environments which best fit their linguistic and social needs—which can be mainstream schools or specialist schools. This “sensory exception” was accepted by governments and is an integral part of the CRPD. The WFD is concerned that deaf children will be swept in an ideological push toward mass placement in mainstream schools, potentially depriving deaf children of their human rights under Article 24. The WFD has collected research evidence that deaf children learn best in bilingual environments with other deaf learners - where the primary language of instruction is sign language. This is essential to support the right to deaf cultural identity and language provided for in the CRPD Article 30.

The WFD urges in the strongest possible way the Committee and other stakeholders to honour the drafting intent of Article 24(3), to listen to the perspectives of deaf people globally and to make decisions based on proven research about what best promotes academic outcomes and social outcomes for deaf children.

The WFD has also raised its concerns about the proposed indicators for reporting to the Committee around Article 24. The WFD made a joint submission with the World Blind Union about the need to recognise this sensory exception in the indicators also. These issues are important for many deaf and blind children globally. We urge the Committee to take into consideration the views of these two global peak bodies.

The WFD notes with great concern the fact that no signing deaf person is on the Committee as it drafts a General Comment on Article 24. In line with the motto “nothing about us without us” the WFD is prepared to strongly voice its disappointment if the General Comment does not adequately uphold the intent of the CRPD. Deaf people’s human rights to choice in education and to be part of environments which maximise their academic and social outcomes are too important for us to ignore.

The WFD looks forward to continuing good cooperation with the Committee and its members in achieving a world aligned with the CRPD. Thank you.

*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 132 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*