



**WORLD FEDERATION
OF THE DEAF**

Statement on the XX World's Congress of the World Federation of the Deaf in 2027 in the United Arab Emirates

11 August 2025

The Ordinary Members of the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) have decided on the United Arab Emirates as the site of the XX World's Congress of the World Federation of the Deaf (World Congress). The Congress will be held in Abu Dhabi from 19 - 23 September 2027. As we prepare for this historic occasion - our first Congress to be held in an Arab country - we want to acknowledge issues raised regarding this decision.

The WFD is a global organisation with member organisations in 138 countries, two-thirds located in the Global South. We have a mission to support deaf people everywhere they are, wherever they are. Arab deaf people have only relatively recently been able to develop deaf-led advocacy organisations, and a 2009 WFD Report on Human Rights revealed deaf people in this region still lack enjoyment of basic human rights.

Hosting the World Congress in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) offers a unique opportunity to engage with new communities, including many deaf people who have never had the chance to participate in a World Congress before. This moment represents a significant step forward in our mission to promote knowledge exchange and the advancement of deaf rights, particularly in regions where access has historically been limited or denied. Our past Congresses have served as vehicles for change: empowering host deaf communities and helping hearing people and governments understand the importance of self-determination in deaf communities. This Congress is an opportunity to engage constructively, using the Congress to promote models of deaf-led change that will reverberate regionally and globally.

In preparation for this major event for the deaf communities, we are working closely with the UAE Organising Committee to ensure a clear understanding of the cultural and legal context of the UAE. We are grateful for their guidance and cooperation. We wish to share the following updates:

On Women's Topics and Participation

The UAE Organising Committee has stated that they welcome tens of millions of international visitors each year, including women travelling independently. There are no mandatory dress codes for international visitors beyond respectful attire in public spaces. There are also no restrictions on women's access to public venues.

Women are fully empowered to participate in professional events, serve as presenters, and take part in all aspects of the World Congress. Discussions and sessions at the World Congress related to women's rights and empowerment are welcome.

On LGBTQ+ Topics and Participation

The UAE Organising Committee has repeatedly stated that all LGBTQIA+ and transgender participants are welcome to attend the World Congress. The UAE welcomes a diverse range of international visitors each year and is committed to treating all guests with dignity and respect.

UAE laws do not permit public promotion of LGBTQIA+ themes. This includes rallies, symbols, visual materials, or presentations that primarily focus on LGBTQIA+ themes.

Other information

Additionally, public manifestations of affection between any individuals - regardless of gender and sexual orientation - are also not allowed and are considered offensive. We encourage participants to be aware of their personal responsibility to respect the legal and cultural context of the country in which the Congress is taking place.

The WFD's Commitment

The WFD remains deeply committed to advocating for human rights. We acknowledge that holding a global event involves navigating diverse cultural, social, and legal contexts. This is not just true for the XX World's Congress, but all our World Congresses to date. Each country has its own laws and cultural traditions that participants must follow. That this Congress has attracted attention may reflect some discomfort with the WFD's work in non-Western contexts. The WFD is not, and will not be, an organisation solely operating in the West. We request recognition that the WFD operates in varied and complex spaces. We can acknowledge the uneven enjoyment of human rights by different groups in different countries, while continuing to bring people together at our Congresses to shape change.



**WORLD FEDERATION
OF THE DEAF**

We call on all participants and partners to approach this World Congress with mutual respect. We strongly believe that presence, dialogue, and visibility are powerful tools for advancing the rights of deaf people. By holding the World Congress in the UAE, we aim to foster new connections, open meaningful conversations, and reach communities that have long been underrepresented in the global deaf movement.

We call on all participants, presenters, and partners to attend the XX World's Congress of the World Federation of the Deaf with a shared commitment towards a world where deaf people everywhere can sign anywhere.