

ANNUAL REPORT

2021



WORLD FEDERATION
OF THE DEAF

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



2025 has been a year where we have worked to build capacity among our national members, with over 90 of our 138 member countries receiving support from us via training, workshops and joint advocacy campaigns. The WFD held three WFD Campus training modules, expanded our work with deaf women on gender equality globally, and hosted the first-ever WFD Conference in Africa, with 50 countries attending our five-day event in Nairobi, Kenya.

The WFD has continued to be highly visible on the global stage, joining with governments and other NGOs at major global events such as the World Summit for Social Development and the Global Disability Summit, to highlight how the human right to our national sign languages is an integral part of the development agenda. We have worked with deaf people from marginalised communities in the Global South, while promoting best practices around the globe for deaf people everywhere.

I want to thank our partners, donors, and members for successful collaboration in 2025. Let's move on to 2026 with renewed commitment to our vision of a world where deaf people everywhere can sign anywhere.

DR JOSEPH J. MURRAY
President



1- BUILDING CAPACITY ACROSS THE GLOBE

In 2025, the WFD expanded capacity-building efforts for deaf communities and National Associations of the Deaf worldwide, focusing on leadership, human rights, and sign language rights.

MEMBERSHIP GROWTH

The WFD currently counts **138 Ordinary Members**, a national association of the deaf. In 2025, we welcomed two new members: **Sierra Leone** and **Iraq**.

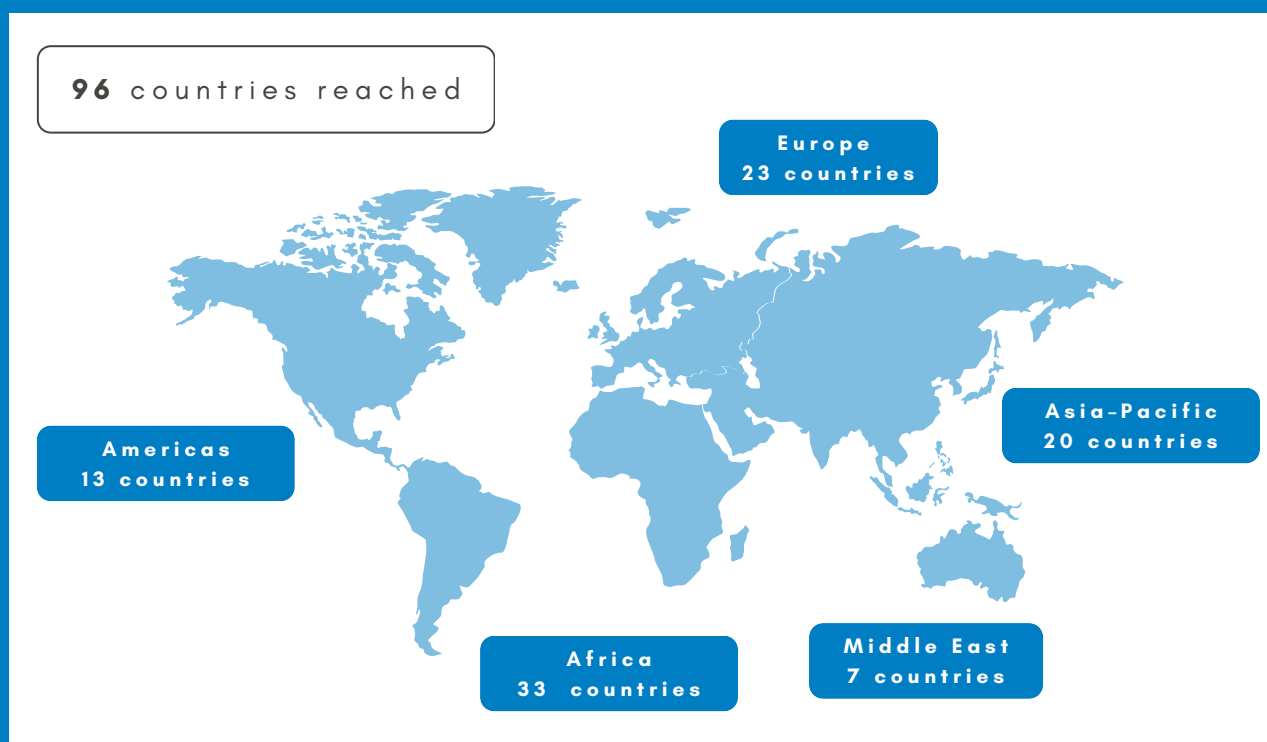
The Associate Membership continued to grow significantly, with **10 new affiliations** from Canada, Guinea, India, Kenya, Mauritius, Nigeria, South Africa, Togo, and Zimbabwe.

In addition, the individual membership expanded across **45 countries**, reflecting the growing global engagement of deaf leaders and advocates in our work.



Photo credit: Charlie Swinbourne

CAPACITY BUILDING, TRAININGS AND PRESENTATIONS



2- PUTTING DEAF PEOPLE ON THE AGENDA

In 2025, the WFD actively worked to ensure that the rights, visibility, and priorities of deaf people were firmly placed on international human rights, development, and education agendas.

The WFD participated in numerous high-level international events, including:

- UNESCO's International Mother Language Day (UNESCO)
- the Zero Project Conference (Austria)
- the Global Disability Summit (Germany)
- I-COUNT (UN New York)
- 18th Conference of States Parties (UN Headquarters)
- UN ESCAP hybrid first session of the Working Group on the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities 2023-2032 (online)
- High-Level Political Forum – HLPF (UN Headquarters)
- the Second World Summit for Social Development (Qatar)
- the 5th Conference of the Arab Forum of Women with Disabilities (Egypt)

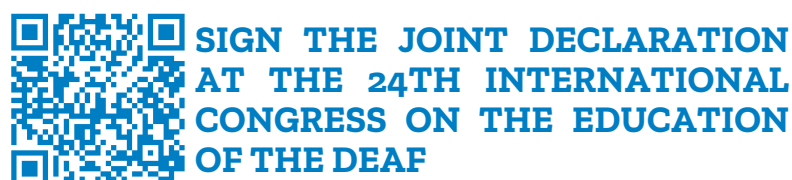


WFD President Joseph J. Murray **addressed United Nations delegates** at the UN General Assembly Hall at the opening of the 18th Conference of State Parties, giving visibility to sign languages on the largest global stage.

ADVOCATING FOR ACCESS

The WFD played a key advocacy role at the United Nations during the 32nd Session of the CRPD Committee, publicly condemning serious accessibility violations, including the lack of sign language interpretation for Committee member Mr Tamon, the forced review of the Dominican Republic without interpretation, and the removal of national sign language from UN TV broadcasts.

The WFD called on the UN to fully uphold its obligations under the UNCRPD. Following sustained advocacy in partnership with the Japanese Federation of the Deaf and the International Disability Alliance (IDA), the WFD saw governments take action to hold the UN Office in Geneva accountable for providing access in national sign languages.



HIGHLIGHT

5TH WFD CONFERENCE



In August 2025, the WFD held its 5th WFD Conference in Nairobi, Kenya, bringing participants **from 50 countries** to strengthen leadership, organisational capacity, and advocacy across the global deaf movement. The conference provided a vital platform for knowledge exchange, networking, and skills-building among National Associations of the Deaf and deaf leaders from all regions.




Three core thematic tracks guided the programme:

- **Robust Deaf Organisations** focused on governance, sustainability, and leadership development;
- **A Changing World** examining the impact of climate change, disaster preparedness, and humanitarian response on deaf communities;
- **Artificial Intelligence and Sign Languages** explores the opportunities and ethical challenges of emerging technologies for linguistic rights.

Through plenary discussions and workshops, the Conference reinforced the WFD's capacity-building mission by equipping participants with practical tools and strategies to advance human rights and sign language recognition at national and regional levels.

3- REALISING NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US

In 2025, the WFD strengthened the participation and leadership of deaf people in global governance and advocacy across several areas, including Centring Deaf Communities in Disaster Risk Reduction and Humanitarian Responses



Addressing one of our key priorities, Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), we proactively **provided support and resources to Ordinary Members facing crises**. We collaborated with our Ordinary Member, the Palestinian Union of the Deaf (PUD), to successfully conduct consultations and submit a report on the situation of deaf people in Gaza. This work also trained PUD staff on disability-disaggregated data collection to inform accessible service delivery in emergencies. Together with the PUD, the WFD delivered a joint submission to the CRPD Committee 33rd session on the Situation of Human Rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, documenting human rights abuses suffered by deaf people in these territories.

The WFD also progressed on **developing an Online DRR Module** in International Sign, funded by the Global Greengrants Fund, to increase the WFD membership's understanding of disaster risk reduction, prevention, and climate justice. The urgent need to integrate sign language rights into emergency planning was also highlighted during the 5th WFD Conference.

In relation to emerging technologies, the WFD participated in the European Union of the Deaf (EUD) **AI Conference**, where the President addressed developments in AI and sign language technologies. The newly-formed WFD Ad Hoc Group on AI will develop policy positions to safeguard deaf people's rights and inclusion.

We also worked to **empower our Ordinary Members**, initiating the Rights in Action Project, which included designing an Organisational Capacity Assessment Tool and ensuring that Ordinary Members from Nigeria and Zimbabwe secured representation on the Project Management Committee, reinforcing deaf-led organisations among OPDs.

INTERNATIONAL WEEK OF DEAF PEOPLE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF SIGN LANGUAGES

The International Week of Deaf People (#IWDP) and the International Day of Sign Languages (#IDSL) were celebrated by deaf communities, governments and international institutions worldwide.

These celebrations emphasised the year's theme of "No human rights without sign language rights".



4- ACHIEVING SIGN LANGUAGE RIGHTS FOR ALL

In 2025, the WFD intensified its global advocacy to advance the legal recognition and protection of national sign languages as a cornerstone of deaf people's human rights.

Significant progress was made toward the recognition and protection of national sign languages worldwide. The WFD published a **Position Paper on the Right of Deaf People to Choose and Access International Sign Services**, reinforcing the importance of linguistic accessibility at global events.



Alongside global advocacy and capacity building, the WFD provided strategic and technical support to its Ordinary Members to advance national campaigns aligned with the UNCRPD. These collective efforts contributed to major legislative or policy progress in **Azerbaijan, Japan, Lesotho, and Bolivia**, bringing the total number of countries with legally **recognised national sign languages to 82 worldwide**.

Crucially, we delivered **two WFD Campus training modules**, one on Human Rights with 23 participants from 11 countries across seven global regional groups (78% Global South) and an inaugural training with the WFD Campus Module on Sign Language Rights, with 28 participants from 18 organisations across six global regions, with the majority (71%) reflecting strong representation from the Global South.

HIGHLIGHT

DEAF WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY



The WFD significantly advanced its commitment to intersectional advocacy, specifically achieving Objective 2's goal of contributing to actions in the field of women's rights.

- A major highlight was hosting the first-ever **Pre-Conference on Deaf Women and Gender Equality** in Kenya in August, preceding the main conference. This two-day event highlighted the role of deaf women and the critical importance of gender equality and empowerment in the broader movement to advance sign language rights. Presentations at the pre-conference specifically discussed the severe consequences, including poorer health, limited opportunities, and increased risk of violence and social exclusion, that deaf women face when they do not receive education or information in sign language. **Deaf women leaders from 43 countries** shared testimonies, research, and strategies focused on dismantling systemic barriers. Through this event, WFD reinforced deaf women's leadership and equipped national associations with knowledge and tools to embed women's rights and equality.



Gender equality is a cross-cutting issue across multiple themes, and the WFD introduced the importance of this theme in multiple international and regional forums in 2025.

- The WFD contributed to ongoing advocacy with a joint WFD EUD **submission to the CRPD Committee on intersectional discrimination on deaf women and girls** to formulate guidelines on this topic. This work is supported by our strategy to collect disaggregated data from our Ordinary Members, which covers areas such as education, sign languages, climate change, and emergencies.
- The WFD prepared a **submission to the 60th Session of the Human Rights Council on Indigenous Peoples' right to data**, including data collection and disaggregation.
- We highlighted our intersectional work at a co-hosted **Side Event on deaf indigenous women's access to health** at the Global Disability Summit and participated in the 5th Conference of the Arab Forum of Women with Disabilities.
- The WFD collaborated with Humanity and Inclusion, IDA, and DIWA in writing a **parallel report on the situation of women with disabilities in Africa** during the ongoing Beijing 30+ African regional consultation.

5- INVESTING IN A STRONG AND SUSTAINABLE ORGANISATION

In 2025, the WFD continued to strengthen its organisational capacity, governance structures, and partnerships to ensure long-term sustainability.



A step forward was achieved within the International Disability Alliance (IDA), where **four signing deaf and DeafBlind leaders were elected** to governance roles: Dr Joseph Murray and Bobbi Beth Scoggins to the IDA Board, and Juan Angel De Gouveia and DeafBlind Sanja Tarczay as Vice Presidents of the IDA General Assembly. This marked a significant advancement for deaf leadership in international disability decision-making.



The Secretariat operated with seven staff members, while governance activities included three Board meetings and six coordination meetings with Regional Secretariats, reinforcing collaboration and alignment across all regions. A leadership transition began with John Moore being **hired to step into the role of Executive Director** from 2026, supporting continuity and alignment with the Action Plan 2023-2027.

In addition, the WFD deepened **strategic partnerships** through the signing of several Memoranda of Understanding with: the World Federation of the Deafblind (WFDB), Greengrants, International Deaf Emergency, 2Gether-International (2GI), Minority Rights Group International.



MOVING FORWARD

2025 marked a year of strengthened impact, global visibility, and deepened leadership for the WFD. Across all five strategic objectives, the WFD expanded capacity among its members, advanced sign language rights, centred deaf leadership in global decision-making, and ensured that deaf people's perspectives shaped international human rights, development, and education agendas. From historic progress in national sign language recognition to meaningful engagement in UN processes, regional forums, and global summits, WFD's work in 2025 reinforced the principle of Nothing About Us Without Us in practice.

At the same time, WFD invested in its own sustainability, strengthening governance, expanding partnerships, and preparing for leadership transition, ensuring the organisation is well positioned for the future.

Looking ahead to 2026, the WFD will celebrate its 75th anniversary. As the world's oldest disability-led international NGO, we look forward to a year filled with renewed commitment to member-led advocacy, expanding training and capacity-building initiatives, advancing intersectional inclusion, and continuing to place deaf people firmly on the global agenda.

The WFD moves into 2026 ready to translate momentum into lasting change, working toward a world where deaf people everywhere can sign anywhere.



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