



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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### **Statement by Elena Down, Human Rights Officer, World Federation of the Deaf, Side Event on Inclusive Education, UN Human Rights Council 2016 Social Forum, 5 October 2016.**

Thank you for the opportunity to participate here today.

I am a Human Rights Officer with World Federation of the Deaf, an international non-governmental organisation, which represents over 70 million deaf people globally. We have members in 132 countries.

Education is an important right recognised throughout the core human rights treaties including the CRPD. It enables many other rights to be achieved.

It should lead not only to academic success but also to growth in the full human person, in language, in culture and confidence in one's identity – to the achievement of full human potential.

#### ***What does this mean for deaf children?***

The CRPD Committee's General Comment on Article 24 contained 7 paragraphs which focus on the importance of sign language, deaf people or deaf culture.

It clearly stated in paragraph 34:

“deaf and hard of hearing students must be provided with the opportunity to learn sign language and measures taken to recognise the linguistic identity of the deaf community”;

**and**

“students who are... deaf... must be provided with education delivered in the most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication for the individual and in environments which maximise personal, academic and social development both within and outside formal school settings.”

#### ***But what does this look like in practice? How do we achieve it in the real world?***

The World Federation of the Deaf recently released a *Position Paper on Language Rights of Deaf Children*. It is available on our website including International Sign at <https://wfdeaf.org/news/wfd-position-paper-language-rights-deaf-children>

It is an evidence based position paper drawing on strong research and the input of a range of experts and academics both deaf and hearing, from around the world.

It finds that high quality bilingual or multilingual education leads to best educational outcomes for deaf children.

#### ***What is bilingual education? Where the primary language of instruction is sign languages supported by written language(s).***

This requires teachers with very fluent signing ability. However, very few countries provide the necessary initial and continuing teacher training programmes.

It is important that as we work to transform education systems, we recognise the learning needs of all groups, and the need for deaf children to learn with deaf peers in a way that allows them to develop their language and culture.

They need to participate in a true and meaningful way in education - not just be in the classroom, but be actively learning and flourishing.

The WFD recommends the paper to those interested to make evidence based policy decisions on the best types of inclusive schooling for deaf children based on extensive research. As I mentioned, it is available in written English and International Sign at <https://wfdeaf.org/news/wfd-position-paper-language-rights-deaf-children>

Early learning of sign language and multilingualism, combined with strong family support for sign languages, best prepares deaf children for their future full and effective participation in society. This is equality and non-discrimination in education. It allows for education which is fully inclusive of deaf learners – their needs, their rights and their choices.

This is what is needed to ensure we achieve Education for All, and the 2030 agenda in the area of education.

***We need to make sure that deaf children are not left behind.***

*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](http://www.wfdeaf.org)) Email: [info@wfd.fi](mailto:info@wfd.fi)*