



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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“Towards the full realization of an inclusive and accessible United Nations for persons with disabilities.”

UN's Inter-Departmental Task on Accessibility feedback

The WFD thanks the United Nations (UN) for the opportunity to provide feedback to the Inter-Department on the accessibility needs of deaf people. WFD provides the following information to assist the UN to improve the experience of deaf people who attend UN meetings, conferences, civil society meetings at any of the UN sites, visit or utilise the UN offices and who access UN information globally. The following is our response to your feedback request:

a. the status and application of existing regulations relating to accessibility of facilities and services for people with disabilities, including reasonable accommodation and universal design;

The overriding framework for access is the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), to which the UN has committed upholding. Of particular relevance are [Article 9](#) (accessibility), [Article 2](#) (definition of language includes sign language) [Article 21](#) (freedom of expression, including in sign languages, promotion of sign languages). Read together, these Articles promote the need to give and receive communication in the language of choice for deaf people, including in sign languages in all official communications and for information provided to the public, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public.

The UN Accessibility Centre notes that *the United Nations Headquarters supports inclusion and enables greater participation of persons with disabilities in intergovernmental process and meetings of the UN.*¹

b. areas that need improvement to ensure full accessibility;

Significant improvements are needed at all of the UN sites in providing:

- (i) accessible communication (sign language translation) and information at live events, webinars and in recorded sessions for future viewing
- (ii) accessible information on websites
- (iii) key documents being translated into accessible formats (i.e. sign language)
- (iv) accessible tours and events at the UN
- (v) accessible emergency warnings, and
- (vi) training for UN personnel on deaf awareness.

c. best practices and views on the provision of accessibility, following universal design and reasonable accommodation; and (d) recommendations on how better coordinate, facilitate and monitor practical accessibility measures in order to provide reasonable accommodation, in a cost-effective manner, to meet the needs of persons with disabilities for their participation at the United Nations, including in meetings, conferences and services.

International Sign Interpreter access

There are hundreds of signed languages globally. As a matter of compromise, and in the spirit of trying to achieve reasonable accommodation, WFD and its member organisations have agreed that *International Sign* (IS) can be used for communication. Whilst not a formal sign language, it is an agreed means of communicating through signs internationally.

It is the responsibility of the UN to provide accessibility of its information and services in accordance with the UN CRPD using professional sign language interpreters with *International Sign* as a priority.

Recommendations for an accessible and inclusive UN environment for deaf people are:

1. The establishment of a dedicated IS interpreting services centre at any of the UN sites, to assist provide the level of access that is required interpreting at live events, tours, and to increase access to UN information made available on the internet.

¹ <http://www.un.org/accessibilitycentre/>

2. IS interpreters must be provided at all UNCPRD-related meetings, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) meetings and events as a matter of course, and at all other UN events where by deaf person (*e.g. WFD or International Disability Alliance (IDA)*) attending or participating;
 - this could be managed either through live (face to face) interpreters and / or Video Relay Interpreting (VRI) service access.
3. Where a deaf person is presenting at or participating in an official interaction (*e.g. as a member of a UN committee, a panel or as a presenter*), that person must have the right to request a sign language interpreter in the sign language of their choice. This sign language interpreter should be available to interpret in the room live, not through relay service, which should be an option of last resort.
4. IS interpreters must be available at, and live filmed at, all UN webinar/webcasts related to the UN CRPD, SDG and at UN events, and other UN events requested by WFD, IDA or a deaf participant/viewer;
 - this could be managed either through Video Relay Interpreting (VRI) service access (IS interpreters can be available from any location).
5. IS interpreters must be hired through an accredited list of IS Interpreters for appropriate quality control, and where periods of longer than one hour are required, two interpreters are required;
 - WFD/World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI) have a list of accredited IS interpreters who are approved to work at International level including UN-related activities.²
6. IS and (or the UN Office's host country's sign language) interpreters are available for the general public UN Tours
 - via call live interpreters pre-booked; and,
 - IS interpretation option available for guided tours on an approved UN Audio Guide Tour app.³
7. Infrastructure (*e.g. screens, devices*) and services to allow:
 - real time captioning at all UN CRPD and SDG events, and at all other UN events where by deaf person (*e.g. WFD or IDA members*) attending or participating
 - accessible public announcements including evacuation
 - captions on public information screens
 - mobile phone and / or pager alert system
 - a built-in visual light system for fire / evacuation / emergency alerts announcements
8. Public address systems, conference and meeting rooms must have
 - a built-in audio loop and
 - radio frequency transmitter device (for hearing augmentation) features to assist those deaf people who use hearing aids
9. Provide an accessible UN website that includes
 - key news and relevant 'way finding' information available in IS
 - all video messages from the UN Secretary General be provided with IS Interpretation along with closed captions in official UN languages
10. UN Personnel should receive basic deaf awareness training, about deaf culture and working with the sign language interpreters, the right to give and receive information in and to promote sign languages.

WFD would be delighted to discuss anything in this submission in more detail.

Warm regards,



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About the World Federation of the Deaf

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 consultative status in the United Nations and is a member of International Disability Alliance (IDA). (www.wfdeaf.org) Email: info@wfdeaf.org

² See <http://wfdeaf.org/our-work/wfd-wasli-accredited-interpreter>

³ E.g. similar to 9/11 Memorial audio tour app - <http://www.911memorial.org/apps>