



27 February 2015

Members of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
Palais des Nations
CH-1211 Geneva 10
Switzerland

Re: Upcoming review on the Dominican Republic

Dear Committee Members,

The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) and the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI) would like to raise some issues for your information upon review on the Dominican Republic. The WFD has human rights project that includes providing training for 12 Dominican deaf leaders on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and its monitoring mechanism. The aim of the training is to build deaf leaders' capacity to become involved in the Dominican disability movement to submit a parallel report. This submission is based on WFD Human Rights Officer's (HRO) visits in the Dominican Republic in June and December 2014 when she trained the deaf leaders at the Asociación Nacional de Sordos de la República Dominicana that is Ordinary Member of the WFD.

The WFD and the WASLI are concerned about the Dominican society being inaccessible for deaf people using sign language and the position of the national association of the deaf. The list of issues on the Dominican Republic includes questions regarding availability of sign language interpretation by various service providers. For instance, if a deaf person wishes to study at an university, s/he needs to pay sign language interpretation, which makes it impossible for deaf people to pursue higher studies if they cannot afford interpreter service.

The Asociación Nacional de Sordos de la República Dominicana is leading a process to revitalise and develop Dominican Sign Language (LESDOM). [The WFD Statement on the Unification of Sign Languages](#) stress the importance of preserving national sign languages – in the case of the Dominican Republic, LESDOM is the national sign language that is being revitalised after widespread use of American Sign Language (ASL) that Americans brought to the country decades ago.

The lack of state-funded professional sign language interpreter training and certification has led to a situation where a majority of sign language interpreters are trained by a religious group, namely Jehovah Witnesses, which has caused two challenges. Firstly, this religious group advocates the use of ASL in the Dominican Republic. There are also other groups in the Dominican Republic promoting the use of ASL. In this regard, it is a problem that a majority of interpreters prefer using ASL instead of LESDOM. [The Cooperation Agreement between the WFD and the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters](#) highlights the primacy of the national association of the deaf to lead sign language training and material development. The Dominican sign language interpreter association has been disseminating sign language dictionaries that are American Sign Language dictionaries with written information translated to Spanish, and provides sign language training. The WFD and the WASLI are not pleased about the leadership position of the sign language interpreter association in aforementioned situations. The Asociación Nacional de Sordos de la República Dominicana should be supported to lead the developments. Secondly, religious aspect affects interpretation. [The World Association of the Sign Language Interpreters' Statement on the Role of Sign Language Interpreters](#) guides interpreters to turn down assignments for which they are not qualified or may not be able to carry out properly. In the current situation where a majority of interpreters are Jehovah Witnesses, some of them might refuse to interpret the national anthem and other issues that are not in line with their religion that may constitute communication barrier for deaf people.

Even though the government of the Dominican Republic is taking steps towards the official recognition of LESDOM (paragraph 2.14 of the reply to the list of issues), the WFD and the WASLI would like to address the process. The Asociación Nacional de Sordos de la República Dominicana has been consulted before the law

draft proceeded to the parliament but was not consulted in previous phases, which is not in line with the spirit of the CRPD where organisations of persons with disabilities should be consulted from the start until the end of planning, preparing, implementing and monitoring issues concerning their lives.

Some schools for the deaf in the Dominican Republic are run by organisations that e.g. seek funding to operate schools. There is no deaf person in managing bodies or other leadership position of these organisations. Moreover, aforementioned organisations are considered as organisations of persons with disabilities and members of the national disability council (CONADIS) while the Asociación Nacional de Sordos de la República Dominicana is not given the same position.

Hopefully these information are useful for your work in reviewing the Dominican Republic. Please do not hesitate contacting us if you have further questions.

Kind regards,

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