



*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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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women  
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Dear Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) thanks for the opportunity to contribute in the development of the general discussion on rural women. In the concept note for the general recommendation on Article 14 of the CEDAW, there are several issues that affect deaf rural women. However, women with disabilities is mentioned only once in the note and linguistic rights are not highlighted. The WFD would like to raise some points of concerns for you to notice in further drafting of the general comment.

The WFD has conducted a survey on deaf people and human rights whose findings are relevant to deaf women. According to the survey, national legislations might be adequate but implementation is problematic. In practise, deaf people do not often receive education in sign language or have possibility to use professional sign language interpreters in all areas of life. When this situation is combined with the lack of awareness about deaf people having same rights as other people, deaf people are usually denied their human rights.<sup>1</sup> The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities highlights the importance of accessibility, including providing professional sign language interpretation, also in rural areas.<sup>2</sup> However, according to information from the World Health Organization, interpreters are not often available in rural areas.<sup>3</sup> Deaf people can enjoy human rights only if sign language is recognised by the government, education is available in sign language, accessibility in all areas of life is ensured in sign language and professional sign language interpreter service is available. Governments do not often have statistics or other information about deaf people.<sup>4</sup> Schools that provide education in sign language and sparse professional sign language interpreters tend to be located in urban areas that pose challenges for women and girls in rural areas to have access to these services.

Deaf rural women are facing challenges in different areas of life. Deafness is still sometimes considered as a punishment in families. Without receiving education in sign language and access to services in their own languages, deaf women often face unemployment and may be burden for their families instead of being able to live independently. In several countries, deaf people are not allowed to obtain driving licenses that is a barrier for e.g. employment and free movement of deaf rural women. Television is one channel for deaf rural women to receive information in sign language but programs in sign language are rare.<sup>5</sup> Deaf women are sometimes wrongly considered unintelligent. In rural Uganda, most deaf women have not attended school and do not have same standards to participate in the society with other people.<sup>6</sup> Information on HIV/AIDS is rarely available for

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<sup>1</sup> Haualand & Allen: Deaf People and Human Rights. p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. 2006. Article 9.

<sup>3</sup> WHO: World Report on Disability. p. 140.

<sup>4</sup> Haualand & Allen: Deaf People and Human Rights. p. 9, 14.

<sup>5</sup> Haualand & Allen: Deaf People and Human Rights. p. 21-22, 37.

<sup>6</sup> HRW: "As if We Weren't Human". p. 25-26, 28.

deaf rural women.<sup>7</sup> In Pacific islands, deaf women have experienced negative attitudes in their communities on the basis of deafness. Violence is a significant problem in the area because deaf women do not know how to react when they experience violence, police authorities do not know how to face deaf women and several deaf women use shelter services.<sup>8</sup> In rural Uganda, it is very challenging for deaf women to report rape to police because authorities do not know sign language or provide interpretation. The lack of sign language interpreter service forces deaf women to rely on their family members that is problematic when independency and confidentiality are considered. In the same country, hospital staff did not communicate with a deaf woman in sign language during childbirth that led to death of a baby and sexual rights of deaf women were questioned in other childbirth. Even though legislation might be appropriate in obliging hospital to provide sign language interpretation, implementation is non-existent.<sup>9</sup>

In order to improve the situation of deaf rural women, raising awareness in the whole community, availability of education in sign language and access to professional sign language interpreter services are vital. Based on aforementioned arguments, I would like to stress the importance of taking needs of deaf rural women into account when you work on drafting the general comment. Please do not hesitate contacting us if you have further questions.

Kind regards,

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Human Rights Officer  
World Federation of the Deaf

Sources:

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<sup>7</sup> WHO: World Report on Disability. p. 20.

<sup>8</sup> UNFPA: A Deeper Silence. p. 96, 111, 113-114.

<sup>9</sup> HRW: "As if We Weren't Human". p. 5, 36, 43-44, 48.