



*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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Craig Mokhiber

Chief

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Dear Mr Mokhiber,

The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) is pleased to be asked to contribute information in the OHCHR upcoming study on the right to education of persons with disabilities. Deaf education is possibly the most controversial subject when discussing education of persons with disabilities. The WFD would like to address subjects of concerns for your attention. Particularly the concept of inclusion is often misinterpreted among governments and schools. Placing a deaf pupil in a mainstream environment is not sufficient without taking various factors into account. On the other hand, education in deaf schools needs to be significantly improved. The WFD has conducted “Human Rights and Deaf People” report in 2009 with some information on the state of deaf education in different countries around the world. The report can be accessed here: <http://www.wfdeaf.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Deaf-People-and-Human-Rights-Report.pdf>. At the moment, the WFD is soliciting partners for a comprehensive survey on the global state of deaf education.

From the WFD’s knowledge via liaison with its 132 national deaf association members around the world, it seems that deaf people are often denied access to formal educational settings. For instance, school enrolment rate of deaf children in Burkina Faso and Rwanda are far lower than children with other disabilities.<sup>1</sup> Deaf people face various barriers in education. Even when deaf have access to education, their education level is low and illiteracy is common because education is often not provided in sign language. The use of sign language in education is banned in some countries. As result of not receiving education in sign language, deaf people do not have same possibilities to lead independent lives compared to hearing counterparts. In many countries, deaf people cannot access to higher education because professional sign language interpretation is not provide by governments. Inaccessible vocational and higher education lead to high percentage of unemployment among deaf people. There is also lack of data on deaf education that makes it even harder to estimate the actual situation. What few statistics that are available might give a misleading picture about the situation because such information usually covers the number of deaf children receiving education and possibility to use sign language in education without providing information about quality of education and sign language skills of teachers.<sup>2</sup> Reasonable accommodation is not provided for deaf students e.g. in China where listening exam is required for university graduation makes it impossible for them to graduate.<sup>3</sup>

Education in in the national sign language and the national written language is one of key factors in fulfilling the human rights of deaf people. Other factors are recognition of sign language, accessibility to all areas of life and professional sign language interpretation that are all interlinked to qualified education in sign language.<sup>4</sup> Linguistic human rights of deaf children are not respected if education is not provided in sign language. As a

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<sup>1</sup> WHO: World Report on Disability. p. 207.

<sup>2</sup> Hualand & Allen: Deaf People and Human Rights. p. 6, 10, 31, 35.

<sup>3</sup> HRW: “As Long as They Let Us Stay in Class”. p. 29.

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

result of unavailability of qualified education in sign language to support literacy of deaf children, illiteracy rate of this population is not equivalent of hearing people.<sup>5</sup> Bilingual education in sign language and written language is vital for deaf children.<sup>6</sup>

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) highlights the right of deaf people to receive education in all levels of education system in sign language. Sign language environment is important factor that is stressed by the CRPD.<sup>7</sup> The CRPD is sometimes understood wrongly because some deaf children are placed in a mainstream school where s/he is the only deaf person and has access only through sign language interpretation. In this way, the deaf person cannot communicate naturally and directly with people surrounding her or him in sign language. Thus academic and social development of deaf person is not maximised. Instead, the deaf person should be placed in a school that has other deaf students and where teachers are very fluent in sign language.<sup>8</sup> Education in mainstream setting is not always a positive experience for deaf students. They face barriers particularly if teachers do not know sign language well. Deaf children have higher risk of becoming abused if other people in schools do not sign proficiently.<sup>9</sup> The WFD stresses the importance of placing a deaf student in an environment that is supportive and where sign language is used. Teachers of deaf children need to be proficient in sign language and training needs to be provided for that purpose.<sup>10</sup> The WFD and its member organisations have seen that hearing teachers of deaf schools do not always know sign language very well.

In order to improve the current situation on the understanding and implementation of the concept of inclusion for deaf pupils and the education level of deaf schools, there is immediate need to correct interpretation of the CRPD of national governments and monitor the quality of education in deaf schools. Hopefully this information is useful for you. Please do not hesitate contacting me if you have further questions.

Kind regards,

Eeva Tupi  
Human Rights Officer  
World Federation of the Deaf

Sources:

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<sup>5</sup> WFD: Education Rights for Deaf Children. p. 2-3.

<sup>6</sup> WHO: World Report on Disability. p. 172.

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. 2006. Article 24.

<sup>8</sup> Haualand & Allen: Deaf People and Human Rights. p. 28.

<sup>9</sup> WHO: World Report on Disability. p. 211, 215-216.

<sup>10</sup> WFD: Education Rights for Deaf Children. p. 3-4.