



Seventh Session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), New York, 10-12 June 2014

Informal panel discussion: Youth with disabilities

Presented at the panel by: Mr Braam Jordaan, Board Member of World Federation of the Deaf Youth Section (WFDYS)

The Statement is available in International Sign at wfdeaf.org/news/wfd-and-wfyds-statement

Good morning panellists, delegates and representatives,

The World Federation of the Deaf Youth Section (WFDYS) is a youth section under the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD), an international organisation which represents 70 million deaf people worldwide. From all the people with disabilities with different walks of life, deaf and deafblind are the only disabilities that strongly rely on Sign Language for effective language acquisition and communication.

First of all I need to emphasise the importance of education. Education is both a right for deaf youth; it is one of key post-2015 development goals. Higher priorities should be given to this. Recognition of the right to education and the right to learn throughout life is more than ever a necessity; it is the right to learn in sign language, read and write, the right to question and analyse the right to have access to resources, and to develop and practice individual and collective skills and competencies.

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." -- Nelson Mandela

The right to education in sign language for deaf youth and children is protected by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Under this treaty, governments have an obligation to facilitate the learning of sign language and to promote the linguistic identity of the Deaf Community (Art. 24.3.b).

In concrete terms, this means employing teachers who are qualified in the national sign language, and training teachers at all levels of education to work with deaf students (Art. 24.4). Without the ability to use sign language on the most basic level, deaf students face significant barriers to being independent. Communication skills are fundamental to getting jobs and participating in the communities and family life. Effectively addressing the concerns of youth with disabilities requires listening to the voice of youth with disabilities and proactively involving them in development, including relevant policy and decision-making processes.

This leads us to our concerns of how youth with disabilities are often overlooked in development programme planning. Development programmes for youth, by governments and NGOs, rarely include young men and women with disabilities. Programmes for people with disabilities, where they exist, are seldom inclusive, concentrating either on children with disabilities in schools, or families, or on employment and social integration of adults with disabilities.

Because of this, WFDYS would like to expand on the effective participation of the youth with disabilities. We, the WFDYS, are currently one of the partners of International Coordination Meeting of Youth-led Organisations (ICMYO) and it is part of the United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth. We, the youth-led organisations promote the Youth21 initiative and have adopted an official position on a Permanent Forum on the Youth, a permanent mechanism through which young people can become involved in United Nations policymaking. With the permanent forum on youth we reaffirm the importance of the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY), and consider the urgent need of effectively implementing it through plans, mechanisms and programs at all levels, including our role in guiding United Nations, inter-governmental processes and youth programmes of inter-governmental and international organisations.

The WFDYS believes the right to education and active participation of the youth in the decision making process are the key to unlock the door of freedom and equality for the youth with different abilities.

In conclusion, the WFD and WFDYS urges State Parties and representatives to recognise the fulfilment of the human rights for the deaf children and youth as one of key indicators for the fulfilment of the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

Every deaf child has a right to a quality education in Sign Language.

Thank you! Amandla!

New York, USA, 12 June 2014

About the World Federation of the Deaf Youth Section

The main aim of the World Federation of the Deaf Youth Section (WFDYS) is to advocate the human rights of deaf youth in the world. Our aims are in accordance with those of the WFD. (www.wfdys.org) Email: info@wfdys.org

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 133 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 member of International Disability Alliance (IDA). (www.wfdeaf.org) Email: info@wfdeaf.org