



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

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A lot to improve in Deaf people's Human Rights

According to the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) the situation of the approximately 72 million Deaf people around the world is still shocking especially in the developing countries where about 80 % of the Deaf live. Social services, education and interpreter service system are often out of reach especially for African Deaf.

“Due to the fact that good command of sign language as well as education reached in sign language opens doors for Deaf people's integration into the society, one should provide Deaf children with an opportunity to acquire the local sign language and guarantee the right to education in this language”, asserts Mr Markku Jokinen, President of the World Federation of the Deaf. Based on new research information the bilingual approach to education is common in only 27 % of the countries. This means that students are taught in sign language as first language and written oral language as second language. Almost half of the education is still accomplished using the oral method which jeopardizes access to information and services for Deaf leaving them in the margins of the society. For most Deaf in developing countries university studies are still something to dream about and initiating vocational studies is almost as rare. Prejudices towards sign languages as well as lack of competent teachers in sign language complicate organising education in the way that would be the most optimum way for Deaf.

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) that entered into force in May, state governments shall recognise sign language as an official language in the Constitution and/or special legislation, ensure professional interpreter services and guarantee bilingual education to Deaf people. Solely this way the Deaf people's Human Rights - still so blatantly violated around the world - will be assured in the future.

Facts on Deaf people's situation in Asia, South-America, Central America and Africa:

- almost all Deaf people have the right to vote, get married and have children – in reality for instance voting can turn out to be impossible because most of the Deaf people are illiterate
- 1 % of the documents that States provide are available in sign language – this prohibits most of the Deaf access to information
- 32 % of the Deaf are denied right to drivers licence – they are considered as a threat to the traffic in many countries
- sign language has an official status in the legislation either guaranteed by the constitution, other legislation or policies in 42 % of the countries. However, in practice the resources for providing services are nil
- in 6 % of the states the decision makers believe that Deaf people don't have any right to education at all
- states have problems in providing education in sign language in all phases of the system, especially for kindergarten age children and young adults

Additional information:

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