

Talking notes for UN Minority Issues Forum

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Greeting and thanks.

I'm here on behalf of the World Federation of the Deaf and we're here to talk about deaf children's right to receive their education in sign language.

Deaf children are a language minority. Even though 95% of deaf children are born to parents who don't initially know sign language, they are part of a language minority.

Deaf people form minority language communities all around the world, and have done so for the last 200 years.

There are 34 million deaf children in the world.¹

Deaf children often don't have access to language both in school and at home.

Has this minority language community been overlooked?

Worldwide, national and international deaf organisations advocate for recognition of deaf people as a language minority community.

As minority language community deaf children have the right to be educated in their minority language – sign language. This is achieved with bi-lingual education.

Very few deaf children currently have this. That is why we are advocating for recognition, why we are talking to our governments about how to implement this.

Bi-lingual education for deaf people requires 4 elements, outlined in the World Federation of the Deaf position paper on Inclusive Education:

1. The educational setting must be bilingual in the national sign language and national written language
 - Providing fluent language models from birth so that deaf children can learn sign language as their first language and arrive at school with a strong foundation language
 - Teaching sign language and deaf culture to deaf children
 - Teaching the national written language through sign language
2. The educational setting must follow the governmental educational curriculum maximising the full academic and social potential of deaf children;
3. Teachers must be fluent in sign language;

¹ [1] World Health Organization (2012). WHO global estimates on prevalence of hearing loss. Available from: <http://www.who.int/pbd/deafness/estimates>
Accessed January 30, 2019.

4. Language immersion spaces: deaf children must be surrounded by their deaf peers and deaf adult role models.

The World Federation of the Deaf is working to achieve a paradigm shift from deaf children being placed in special schools to deaf children being seen as a language minority and taught in bi-lingual education settings.

We know that right now many deaf are in special school placements and are receiving a lower standard of education than their same age peers. Of those 34 million deaf children in the world, very few are receiving their education in bi-lingual settings.

Deaf children have the right to access the same education opportunities as the majority language users.

Deaf children have language rights as clarified in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which clarifies deaf children's and the family's right to sign language. Deaf children also have their right to be taught in sign language outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Recommendation:

The World Federation of the Deaf recommends that Government's laws must specify that deaf children have the right to bi-lingual education in sign language environments. With these legal provisions there must be resources, concrete actions and measures for monitoring.

Thank you.