



*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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**Dr. Joseph J. Murray, President, World Federation of the Deaf**  
**Ms. Victoria Manning, Board Member, World Federation of the Deaf**

**Statement at the 12<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations Forum on Minority Issues**  
**29 November 2019**  
**Geneva, Switzerland**

The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) is an international non-governmental organisation representing approximately 70 million deaf people worldwide. We recently released a Charter on “Sign Language Rights for All” which is available on our website ([www.wfdeaf.org/charter](http://www.wfdeaf.org/charter)) for governments, organizations, and other stakeholders, including individuals, to sign as an endorsement of the principles of full inclusion for deaf people as sign language users. We emphasise the paradigm shift from the medical model of disability to the human rights model of disability. Deaf people are human rights holders entitled to equal opportunities to participate in society in the same way as other citizens.

Deaf communities are part of a unique intersectionality of rights, belonging to both linguistic and cultural groups, and the disability movement. Deaf people have their own identity, mainly tied to national sign languages and social connections built on the shared experience of the use of these languages. Sign language and deaf culture strengthens multilingualism and are means of promoting, protecting and preserving the diversity of languages and cultures globally. Deaf people are found among all cultural, linguistic, and ethnic minorities and the deaf community is a diverse and intersectional community.

The WFD calls for an intersectional approach to securing the human rights of deaf people. Such an approach includes attention to the rights of deaf people, deaf children, deaf youth, deaf women, deaf elders, deaf LGBTQIA+, deaf migrants, deafblind people, families of deaf children, children of deaf adults (CODA), and all other people using sign language to benefit from full and effective access to the community, including the Deaf Community and mainstream services through the use of sign language.

Through the principle of “nothing about us without us”. Deaf women and girls should have the opportunity to comment on their own life situations. We note that deaf women and girls are under-represented due to their gender, disability, and linguistic minority status. Specific measures must be implemented to safeguard gender equality, diversity and equal participation in society and in decision-making processes for all deaf people. We would like to call attention to a significant barrier with regard to fully understanding the human rights situation of deaf people in gender-specific ways. There is simply very little data on the lives of deaf people, especially deaf people in the Global South. With this intervention, the WFD wishes to bring attention to the need for more research focused on the human rights situation of deaf people, and of specific populations of deaf people, including deaf women and girls.

And finally, we call on all stakeholders at this 12th Session of the United Nations Forum on Minority Issues to endorse our Charter and work with us to achieve Sign Language Rights for All!