

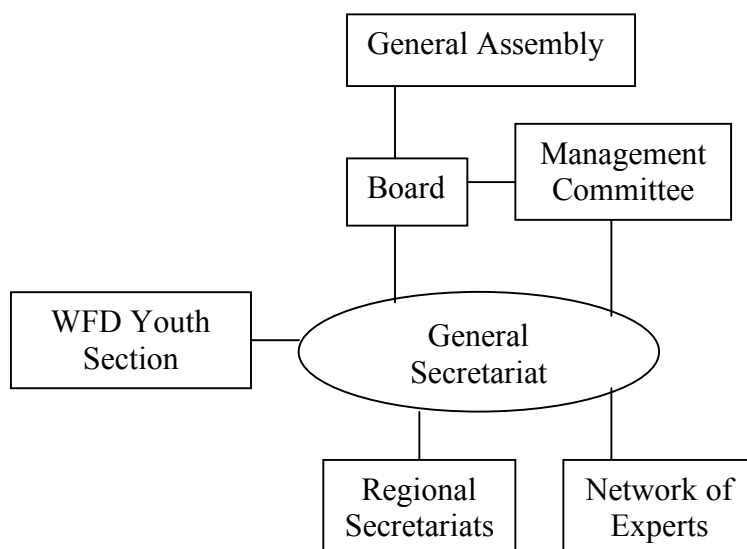
## **Report Based on the Meeting with Dr. Liisa Kauppinen, President Emerita of the World Federation of the Deaf**

### **The World Federation of the Deaf**

The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD), founded in 1951 in Rome, Italy, is one of the oldest disability organizations. The official language is English. It has representative status at the Economic and Social Council, International Labor Organization, and the World Health Organization. The legal seat is in Helsinki, Finland, and the organization largely depends on the Finnish Association of the Deaf for funding.

The mission of the WFD is to promote awareness and human rights of the Deaf people around the world. It plays a large role in providing encouragement and support to its member organizations in addition to offering its expertise when organizations are launching new projects.

The organizational structure of the WFD is:



The General Assembly (GA) is the highest decision-making body and each Ordinary Member has the right to send up to two delegates to attend the GA. The GA meets every four years, in conjunction of the World Congress. During the GA meeting, the members elect an executive Board of the WFD and approve the WFD plan of action for the next four years.

There are 11 members, all Deaf, on the Board and they come from different countries. The members are: President, Vice President, and nine other members. The current Board members are, for example:

President Markku Jokinen (Finland)  
Vice President Feliciano Sola Limia (Spain)  
Hanne Berg Kvitvaer (Norway)  
Martha Osorno Posada (Colombia)  
Len Mitchell (Canada)  
Tomas Hedberg (Sweden)  
Joe Murray (USA)  
Jacobus Kellerman (South Africa)  
Colin Allen (Australia)  
Francis K. Boison (Ghana)

The Board is responsible for the implementation of any resolution and recommendation that the World Congress makes.

The General Secretariat represents the WFD Board and is responsible for the day-to-day work of the WFD. It is the central contact source and it is in charge of the publication of the WFD newsletter, updating the WFD website, and overseeing the administration of the WFD projects.

The General Secretariat is in contact with seven Regional Secretariats, which are divided into the following regions: South America, Central America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific, East and Southern Africa, Eastern Europe and Middle Asia, Central Europe, and Arab Region.

The Network of Experts section is a group that promotes the exchange of information and research findings. It also plays a key role by offering its expertise during any kind of implementation. It undertakes the planning and implementation of international and regional surveys and conducts studies for the WFD. Sometimes a team of experts from this network forms to focus on specific issues in the WFD or in a member's organization. This section covers a number of areas, including Deaf Senior Citizens and Deaf with Disabilities.

The WFD Youth Section is an independent committee of young Deaf adults between the ages of 18 and 30. It has its own rules and procedures that are within the scope of the WFD Statutes and aims. This group has five officers, which are appointed by the Ordinary Members and the five officers decide who will be the President and Vice-President.

### **WFD and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

The Ad Hoc committee for the drafting of the Convention was established in 2001 and the work began in 2002. The United Nations refused to provide sign language interpreters or speech-to-text service for the Deaf participants.\* However, they provided the draft of the Convention in Braille for blind people. While the WFD worked with the different member states and representatives of the Ad Hoc committee, it related particularly closely with the representatives of the deaf organizations and/or government representatives that are Deaf.

The WFD worked with the Deaf government representatives from Venezuela, Qatar, Russia, South Africa, and Italy. The representatives of the Deaf organizations

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\* DESA however was willing to provide an interpreter for a deaf representative because she is from a developing country.

are from Chile, Colombia, South Korea, Australia, and Japan. The Australian representative is a lawyer who contributed his legal knowledge.

The Deaf representatives and the WFD relied on contemporary issues and established laws in different countries that protect and promote the rights of Deaf people as a guideline to determine what should be included in the Convention and how to word them.

To accomplish this, the WFD sent letters to the Ordinary Members and contacted different Deaf organizations around the world urging them to speak up to their government and explain the needs and rights of deaf people and what they wanted their governments to do. The WFD also urged the Deaf organizations to participate in the Ad Hoc committee.

Dr. Liisa Kauppinen, President Emerita of the WFD, said she received responses from different Deaf organizations informing her that they advocated in their countries. Some Member States at the Ad Hoc meetings also informed her that they have been contacted by deaf organizations in their countries. Unfortunately, the majority of the Deaf organizations did not take any active role. Dr. Kauppinen explained that there were several reasons for this:

1. Some deaf organizations are apathetic and/or disorganized.
2. Because the official language of the WFD is English, the letters sent out are written in English and there are many Deaf organizations around the world, particularly in the developing countries, that do not have anyone who speaks English on their staff and cannot afford to have the documents translated.
3. Many deaf people do not have a strong sense of identity as a Deaf person and often do not have education (80% of the deaf people in the world do not have any kind of education).
4. Some deaf organizations are sports/recreational-oriented and are not interested in educational, civil, and cultural rights.

For the organizations that are not able to afford to have their documents translated or interpreted into the native sign language, the WFD helps the organizations by going to

the region to give a presentation on Deaf identity, the rights to be treated and considered equal as their hearing counterparts, as well as helping deaf organizations find funding for document translations. The WFD faced different challenges in different regions:

### **Asia Pacific**

President Jokinen went to the Asia Pacific region and met with 125 delegates to discuss about the importance of the Convention and what the deaf organizations need to do. Many of them are unable to meet with government officials because their countries do not even have sign language interpreters, therefore communication between them is not possible.

### **Africa**

African deaf organizations have the same problem as those in Asia Pacific. Additionally, the North African region did not have any funding; therefore it was not able to translate the documents into the local languages. East South Africa, however, has a WFD office, that was formerly funded by Sweden and now by Norway, so the issues faced in East South Africa are less severe than in North Africa.

### **Arab Region**

They have a number of deaf organizations, however they are for sports participation. There is no deaf organization that focuses on human rights, health, education, and welfare. Therefore they are not interested in the Convention.

### **Latin America**

The WFD faces the same obstacles in Latin America faced in the Arab Region.

### **Russia and the Former Soviet States**

The deaf organizations in the Soviet region did not have access to the internet, so they were not aware of the Convention. The WFD recently hosted a conference in Moscow, where delegates from Russia and 10 former Soviet states met, and it was the first time they found out about the Convention and what it meant for them.

It is quite difficult for the WFD to help eliminate the different obstacles faced in different regions. The WFD faces financial challenge as well as the apathetic and insecure attitudes of many deaf organizations and people that have been in result of their condition and society's perception and treatment of them. Additionally, there are many disability organizations in these countries that excluded deaf organizations from participating in government-hosted roundtables to discuss disability issues and

suggestions for language to be included in the Convention because they did not consider them as equal.

Unfortunately, the WFD and other deaf representatives also faced challenges within the Ad Hoc committee. Several member states were resistant to including “sign language” in Article 2, under the definition of language. Some were also resistant in including part b of Article 24, which is “Facilitating the learning of sign language and the promotion of the linguistic identity of the deaf community.” Additionally, they face challenges from other disability organizations. However, at the end, they were able to work with them and reached agreements.

### **What the WFD Plans to Do After the Adoption of the Convention**

The biggest challenge is to have governments recognize sign languages used by their Deaf citizens as a language. In order to accomplish that, it is imperative that the Deaf people in each country have a Deaf identity and value their right to education, culture, health, and using sign language to communicate.

The good news is that from 1992, when the recommendation of the implementation of the rights of persons with disabilities started, 30 different governments recognized sign language as a language and the right of Deaf people to use sign language. Since 2002, 10 more countries have passed similar recognition.

The WFD plans to try to get funding from the developed countries to help train the deaf people in the developing countries. The WFD wants to give two different training programs. The first training program would include developing Deaf identity, awareness of human rights and its importance. It would also explain the importance of the Disability Convention and what it means for them.

The second training session would teach them how to advocate for their rights to education, culture, health, social welfare, and language. It would also teach them how to lobby the government to implement those rights. The WFD would also write a guideline for the deaf organizations to use for advocating on behalf of the deaf people in the countries and to have the government to ratify the Convention. Additionally, the WFD plans to talk to the United Nations and see if it would be willing to either provide funding to translate the guideline or do the translation.

The WFD also plans to give talk to different governments to expose them the importance of the Convention. For example, Dr. Kauppinen spoke at the French parliament and compared the Convention draft with the new French disability law. She showed that the Convention draft gave better protection for disabled people than the new French disability law.

### **Elderly Deaf**

The WFD has no official section on elderly Deaf people. This is an important section to include due to the growing proportion of elderly people in the world. The population of the elderly deaf is growing as well. Additionally, most elderly deaf do not have any formal education (80% worldwide); therefore their access to job opportunity is minimal, if any. That means they will not have worked enough to receive a stable pension.

Many deaf organizations around the world do not focus on elderly people. Many elderly people are not seen at different conferences that focused on the rights of deaf people. Many deaf organizations do not even know the condition or situation of the elderly people. They do not even know where they are.

Dr. Kauppinen explained that in January 2007 the WFD will have a meeting to come up with a 4-year plan and she will be sure to include elderly issues at the meeting. The WFD and Global Action on Aging are very interested in working together to research and promote awareness on issues related to the deaf elders. Dr. Kauppinen stated that the European Union of the Deaf, as well as the Danish, Japanese, and French Deaf associations, did research on elderly Deaf people in their respective regions. So, collaboration between these organizations and Global Action on Aging is possible.