



**WORLD FEDERATION
OF THE DEAF**

Input of the World Federation of the Deaf to the call for inputs to inform the report of Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities to the UN General Assembly on the participation of persons with disabilities in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Post-2030 discussions.

Introduction:

The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) is honoured to contribute to the call for input of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities. The 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 deaf organisations from 136 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. Its vision is a “world where deaf people everywhere can sign anywhere”. The WFD has a consultative status in the United Nations and is a founding member of the International Disability Alliance (IDA).

The input from the World Federation of the Deaf will highlight the unique perspective of deaf people as part of a linguistic and cultural minority, especially through the use of their national/Indigenous sign languages (I). Based on this perspective, we would like to share the barriers faced by our organisation, the World Federation of the Deaf, in the process leading to the Summit of the Future 2024 and its outcome documents (II).

I. Linguistic human rights of deaf people:

The deaf community presents unique intersectionality between the disability community and those communities which identify as cultural and linguistic minorities under the application of the international human rights instruments. The deaf Community belongs to both the group of persons with disabilities and the group of linguistic and cultural minorities¹. When addressing deaf people's linguistic human rights, it must be considered from a cultural and linguistic standpoint, with sign languages being the core feature to ensure the achievement and respect of human rights of deaf people. National “sign languages are the fully fledged natural languages, structurally distinct from spoken languages, alongside which they coexist” as recognised by the United Nations General Assembly in its Resolution recognising the International Day of Sign Languages².

¹ World Federation of the Deaf, Position Paper on the Complementary or diametrically opposed: Situating Deaf Communities within ‘disability’ vs ‘cultural and linguistic minority’ constructs, 2019, available at: <http://wfdeaf.org/news/resources/wfd-position-paper-complementary-diametrically-opposed-situating-deaf-communities-within-disability-vs-cultural-linguistic-minority-constructs/>

² United Nations General Assembly, Resolution adopted on 19 December 2017, A/RES/72/161.



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Deaf people face huge barriers in participating in society on an equal step with others since most information and communication is not provided in their sign languages. National sign languages are minority languages used by deaf communities within a given country, whereas written/spoken languages constitute the dominant language of the country. To this day only 77 countries out of 195 countries in the world have legally recognised their national sign languages, as enshrined in Article 2.2 and Article 21(e) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

In this perspective, the recognition and the promotion of the use of sign languages by the public authorities ensure deaf people's full access to information and communication and active participation in the society as enshrined in Articles 9 and 21 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities³. Deaf people have the right to access to information in accessible formats such as sign language, and this shall be implemented among the facilities and services open or provided to the public, at different levels being international, national, and sub-national. Finally, regarding the obligation of the UN and its bodies, the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS) foresees that in its Indicator 6 that they shall comply with an accessibility policy/strategy and under Indicator 6.1. that they shall ensure that policies and guidelines on accessibility of conference services and facilities are in place.

II. Barriers faced in the process leading to the Summit of the Future 2024 and its outcome documents

The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD), being the sole representative international non governmental organisation of national federations of deaf people, has been involved in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the international level while having full access to information provided with International Sign interpretation during the annual High Level Political Forums, and in particular the SDG Summit of 2023 and the High-Level Dialogue on Financing for Development. With the perspective of contributing to the Summit of the Future 2025, the WFD joined the virtual and in person consultative meetings and events to ensure our inputs regarding the rights of deaf people are taken into account in the Pact for the Future and the Declaration on Future Generations. However, we faced a lack of accessibility as no International Sign/English interpretation was provided upon our prior request at the registration stage. We will share three instances where we were unable to share our statement in sign language and contribute to the shaping of the Pact for the Future and the Declaration for Future Generations with the perspectives of deaf (young) people.

Specifically, at the Summit of the Future Virtual Consultation co-facilitated by Germany and Namibia on 17 April 2024, our Human Rights Officer who is deaf and a sign language user, was unable to share a statement on the Zero Draft Pact for the Future. We shared our dismay and demanded the co-facilitators to address this crucial issue as it prevents the deaf community to contribute to the Pact

³ UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, article 21.

for the Future.



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Moreover, at the Virtual Stakeholders' Briefing on the Declaration for Future Generations on 12 June 2024, our Human Rights Officer faced the same issue and reiterated her requirements for sign language accessibility to be provided by the facilitators of the future consultations to ensure the voices of deaf young people are heard.

The same applies at the 2024 United Nations Civil Society Conference in Nairobi, Kenya, where several deaf representatives from national organisations of deaf people faced a major issue in terms of accessibility: no International Sign/English interpreter was foreseen on the first day on May 9, and even though the organisers did their best to accommodate as quickly as possible for the rest of the Conference, hiring local interpreters at the last minute, all of them not qualified and accredited as professional English/International Sign interpreters by the WFD/WASLI, it had a major limiting impact on the participation of the deaf representatives in the consultation processes.

Based on those experiences, the deaf community and its representatives within the World Federation of the Deaf and some of our Ordinary Members, the national federations of the deaf, we ask your office to seriously take into account our requirements for full accessibility of the consultation processes in sign language. We also invite you, the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, to call upon the co-facilitators of the virtual consultation sessions and the hosts of events leading to the Summit of the Future, as well as the Summit of the Future itself, to hold them accountable for their obligation to include everyone in their actions, including deaf people who are sign language users, in line with the CRPD and the UNDIS. Last, but not least, we urge the events' organisers to contact the deaf representatives of the World Federation of the Deaf and the national federations of the deaf who are registered for their events and asked for sign language accessibility to consult with them and to take into account their sign language interpretation needs and preferences, as enshrined under Article 4.3 of the CRPD.

III. Data gathered for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The data for the follow-up and evaluation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is presently not effectively disaggregated by disability, as this report mentions: "The Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2024",⁴ therefore this limits the capacity to monitor, and evaluate progress for people with disabilities. Additionally, because of this lack of disaggregation, the data does not capture information about deaf communities and about sign languages. Furthermore, sign languages and the deaf community's particular communication needs are not adequately recognised or handled in the data gathering process. As a result, the limited access to this data, further limits our ability to fully engage in and benefit from sustainable development projects.

⁴ <https://unescap.org/kp/2024/asia-and-pacific-sdg-progress-report-2024>



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IV. Conclusion:

To conclude, deaf people are both disability rights holders and minority rights holders, although some governments and/or international bodies do not recognise their unique intersectionality and ensure their linguistic needs are taken into account, hindering their participation in consultative and decision-making processes. Based on the recent experiences faced by deaf representatives of international and national federations of the deaf in the consultation processes leading to the Summit of the Future, we strongly recommend that all consultation activities and events are made fully accessible through the provision of qualified and accredited sign language interpreters and to consult with the deaf representatives to ensure their needs are met in their participation in the processes. This would contribute to the achievement of the disability community's vision of "Nothing about us without us" and the World Federation of the Deaf's vision of "a world where deaf people everywhere can sign anywhere".