

News Update

13 October 2011

Deaf people demand apology from Telstra Businesswoman of the Year.

Deaf Australia and the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) have called for a public apology today from Telstra Queensland Businesswoman of the Year, Ms Dimity Dornan, for her comments about deafness in her award acceptance speech on Tuesday as published in the Sydney Morning Herald.

Ms Dornan, a speech therapist, who founded the Hear and Say Centre in Brisbane, is quoted as saying, "Deafness is at the same stage as polio ... it is a scourge in our world". Her clinics discourage the use of sign language, the official language of deaf people in Australia. She is well known for making this type of comment and has previously said that deafness is a "neurological emergency" that must be eliminated.

WFD President, Sydneysider Colin Allen and Deaf Australia President Ann Darwin call on Ms Dornan to publicly apologise to the 70 million deaf people she has insulted world wide.

The WFD and Deaf Australia have held discussions with human rights experts to set up a course of action.

"Ms Dornan's words make a mockery of real deaf people's lives and their experiences. Her claim to represent all people who are deaf, particularly children who are deaf, is simply false and misleading," said Ms Darwin. "She does not speak for us."

"It is unthinkable that this type of comment would be made publicly," said Mr Allen, "Particularly as we begin to celebrate the Deaf community, its language and culture with National Week of Deaf People beginning next week."

Karen Lloyd AM, Executive Officer of Deaf Australia, the national peak body representing Deaf people's interests in Australia, said today, "We are deeply offended at Ms Doran's comments. She clearly does not understand Deaf people and culture at all.

"I invite Ms Doran to attend our NWDP events to learn more about the reality of the Deaf community and the normal, full and meaningful lives they lead."

WFD and Deaf Australia respect parents' choices but their position is firmly that deaf children have the right to use sign language as well as English and to have their deaf identity actively accepted and respected.

"Parents should not have to choose between either speech or sign language," said Ms Lloyd, "They should have access to both speech and sign language for their child and be supported to make the best possible choices for their child's needs."

WFD and Deaf Australia will release more information as it becomes available.