



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

PO Box 65, FIN-00401 Helsinki, FINLAND

FAX: +358 9 580 3572

www.wfdeaf.org

29th March 2010

To whom it may concern

The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) is an international, non-governmental central organisation of national associations of Deaf people, with a current membership of associations in 130 countries worldwide. WFD's philosophy is one of equality, human rights and respect for all people, regardless of race, nationality, religion, gender, sexual preference, age and all other differences. WFD supports and promotes in its work the many United Nations conventions on human rights, with a focus on Deaf people who use sign language, and their friends and family.

WFD has consultative status in the United Nations (UN) system, including the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC); the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); the International Labour Organization (ILO); and the World Health Organization (WHO). WFD also co-operates closely with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and has representatives on the Panel of Experts on the UN Standard Rules for the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. WFD is a member of the International Disability Alliance (IDA).

At the international level, people who are hard of hearing and do not use sign language are represented by the International Federation of the Hard of Hearing (IFHOH). The WFD and IFHOH collaborate on a number of international issues which affect people with a hearing loss. The IFHOH does not comment on issues in relation to sign language as it is not their area of expertise.

The WFD wishes to state that Deaf Australia (DA), Inc. is an Ordinary Member of the WFD. As such, it is the sole representative body of Deaf people who use sign language which the WFD consults on matters to do with sign language and Deaf people who use it. DA is the only organisation in Australia with an international mandate to represent the interests of Deaf people who use sign language.

The WFD understand that there is an organisation known as Deafness Forum of Australia (DFA), which claims to also represent the interests of Deaf people who use sign language. It is our understanding from the DA that this organisation does not have a majority of Deaf people who use sign language, or organisations governed by them, among its membership or on its governing body.

Since DFA does not fully represent the interests of Australian Deaf people who use sign language, it is not appropriate for the DFA to make independent statements about sign language or about Deaf people who use sign language.

The WFD also wish to point out that several articles in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities apply in this case, for example:

Preamble o: “persons with disabilities should have the opportunity to be actively involved in decision making process about policies and programmes, including those directly concerning them”

Article 4.3. “In the development and implementation of legislation and policies to implement the present Convention, and in other decision-making processes concerning issues relating to persons with disabilities, States Parties shall closely consult with and actively involve persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, through their representative organizations.”

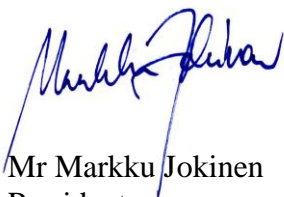
Article 29. States Parties shall guarantee to persons with disabilities political rights and the opportunity to enjoy them on an equal basis with others, and shall undertake to:

- b.** Promote actively an environment in which persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in the conduct of public affairs, without discrimination and on an equal basis with others, and encourage their participation in public affairs, including:
 - ii.** Forming and joining organizations of persons with disabilities to represent persons with disabilities at international, national, regional and local levels.

The WFD therefore wishes to respectfully urge all responsible parties to ensure that our Australian Ordinary Member, Deaf Australia Inc, is able to continue to fulfil its role as the national representative organisation for Deaf people who use Australian Sign Language, unimpeded by competing claims.

On a final note, the WFD wish to encourage both DFA and DA to take this opportunity to meet and reaffirm the position that DA shall take the lead in issues related to Deaf people who use sign language. It is also important that DFA recognize DA is the sole internationally-recognized Australian organisation of Deaf people who use sign language.

Yours sincerely,



Mr Markku Jokinen
President
World Federation of the Deaf