



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.

PO Box 65, 00401 Helsinki, FINLAND

www.wfdeaf.org

President

JOSEPH J. MURRAY

Email: info@wfdeaf.org

23 March 2020

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
Director-General
World Health Organisation

The World Health Organisation's Provision of Public Health Information in International Sign during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The ongoing COVID-19 outbreak presents an unprecedented global health crisis impacting the lives of people around the world, including the more than 70 million deaf people around the world. The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) would like to applaud the World Health Organisation (WHO) for its speedy response and clear instructions given to national governments, regional institutions, and the public in response to this crisis.

The WHO's ongoing work to ensure accurate public information on the COVID-19 pandemic can be best achieved for deaf people if they are also done in International Sign. More specifically:

- The WHO's public video communications, including press conferences, during the COVID-19 pandemic should be interpreted into International Sign.
- Public health video materials developed by the WHO aimed at the global public should also be provided in International Sign.
- The WHO should disseminate guidance to national health authorities of the need to make their public health materials and public announcements accessible for deaf people in their national sign languages. Please see the [WFD and WASLI Guidelines on Providing Access to Public Health Information in National Sign Languages during the Coronavirus Pandemic](#) for recommended best practice.

This mandate towards sign language access is part of established international human rights law. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) includes two specific provisions (Articles 9 and 21) obliging States Parties to the Conventions to take appropriate measures enabling

persons with disabilities, including deaf people, are able to participate fully in all aspects of life and to have access via professional sign language interpreters. In addition, States Parties must facilitate the use of sign languages in official interactions to ensure equal access to information for deaf people.

The [UN Disability Inclusion Strategy](#) highlights that internal and external communication of the UN and its system should be respectful of persons with disabilities. Additionally, this document recognises that accessibility means ensuring that persons with disabilities have equal access to information and communications. Therefore, the provision of information in International Sign is part of the WHO's obligation to respect the spirit and the objectives of this strategy.

The WHO can work with [WFD – WASLI accredited International Sign Interpreters](#) who have extensive working knowledge of the United Nations system. Use of accredited interpreters ensures quality professional International Sign Interpretation (More information can be found in the '[WFD-WASLI International Sign Interpreter Recognition Interim Policy and Guidelines](#)') For further information on best practices in interpreting access, please refer to the WFD [Position Paper on Accessibility: Sign Language Interpreting and translation and technological developments](#).

The WFD is working to support our 125 national members and deaf people around the world during this pandemic. We encourage the WHO to consult our website (<http://wfdeaf.org/coronavirus/>) for updated Guidelines and Best Practices. This website will be updated on an ongoing basis.

In the spirit of solidarity, the World Federation of the Deaf stands ready to assist the World Health Organisation in ensuring best practices in the provision of public health information in sign languages to the more than 70 million deaf people around the world.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joseph J. Murray', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Dr. Joseph J. Murray
President

About the World Federation of the Deaf

The World Federation of the Deaf (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 125 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. WFD has a consultative status in the United Nations and is a founding member of International Disability Alliance (IDA). (www.wfdeaf.org) Email: info@wfdeaf.org