Guidelines on achieving Sign Language Rights for All!

In 2017, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Resolution A/C.3/72/L.36/Rev.1 recognising 23 September as the International Day of Sign Languages (IDSL), being part of the International Week of the Deaf (IWDeaf). The objective of the IDSL is to raise awareness on sign languages and strengthen the status of sign languages. This event also will take place as part of the IWDeaf, which is celebrated annually during the last full week of September.

The IWDeaf is an initiative of the WFD that was first launched in September, 1958 in Rome, Italy. It is celebrated annually by the global Deaf Community to commemorate the same month in which the first World Congress of the WFD was held.

The theme of the 2019 IWDeaf is **Sign Language Rights for All!** In addition, the WFD Board decided to create sub-themes for each day of the week from Monday 23 September to Sunday 29 September 2019. Those sub-themes aim to include the most marginalised groups within Deaf Communities for everyone to equally benefit from their sign language rights. These which will be:

1. **Monday, 23 September - Sign Language Rights for All!**

   Sign language is the critical prerequisite to reach the full participation of deaf people in their communities and to ensure the realisation of their human rights. Governments must provide support and disseminate information on early acquisition to sign language and provide inclusive quality bilingual education. In addition, they must provide and fund professional and trained sign language interpreters to enable the participation of deaf people in society.

   The legal recognition of national sign languages as official languages is capital for the inclusion of deaf people in implementing and achieving the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the 2030 Agenda to make the mottos “Nothing About Us Without Us” to “Leave No One Behind” become a reality.

2. **Tuesday, 24 September - Sign Language Rights for All Children**

   Sign language is the language deaf children can learn naturally and effortlessly. However, as 95% of deaf children are born to hearing parents who usually don’t know sign language, most of those children receive late exposure to sign language resulting in late cognitive development and less chance to acquire language proficiency. Early access to sign language and quality inclusive education through a national sign language and national written language for all deaf children is the key to safeguarding their human rights. To ensure this, families of deaf children must receive state-funded sign language training as early as possible.

   In addition, deaf children have the right to receive education in their natural language through quality inclusive bilingual education in a national sign language and national written language. Teachers must master sign languages with a native-level proficiency and deaf children must be surrounded by their deaf peers and deaf adult role models. Those settings are the cradle to developing their identity and culture.
2. **Wednesday, 25 September - Sign Language Rights for Deaf Senior Citizens**

The global population is increasingly growingly ageing, so are deaf people. Some deaf senior citizens are outplaced in care centres and nursing homes. Many of these places do not provide services in sign language. As a result, deaf senior citizens do not benefit from their fundamental right to receive information and services in their natural language, the national sign language. Public authorities must ensure all information destined for senior deaf citizens is accessible in their national sign language and service providers have fluent sign language skills for deaf senior citizens to be given the same opportunities as others. Human rights are for everyone, including deaf senior citizens!

3. **Thursday, 26 September - Sign Language Rights for Deafblind people**

Deafblind people have the right to participate in society on an equal basis. They may require communication modes and sign language interpretation that are designed for Deafblind people. Such an interpretation may also include environmental description and guiding. With state-funded sign language interpreter services, Deafblind people can achieve full participation, equality, independence and self-determination in all areas of life.

**Friday, 27 September - Sign Language Rights for Deaf Women**

Deaf women represent the majority of the deaf population as the global gender rate indicates displays that the ratio of women is superior to the ratio of men. However, deaf women often do not benefit from the same opportunities as both their male and hearing counterparts to participate in society and to have a meaningful active role. Article 6 of the CRPD specifically recognises that women and girls with disabilities, including deaf women, are at risk of being subject to multiple discrimination. National governments and all other stakeholders must take measures to ensure the full development, advancement, empowerment and equal participation of deaf women in their society and community. Thus, deaf women can enjoy their human rights in all spheres of life!

4. **Saturday, 28 September - Sign Language Rights for Deaf LGBTQIA+**

Deaf LGBTQIA+ are further marginalised due to their gender, disability and sexual orientation intersectionality. Being deaf and having a different sexual orientation or sexual identity may lead to double discrimination from society and community. This is accentuated into triple discrimination if the person is a deaf woman with a different sexual orientation. Deaf LGBTQIA+ are often underrepresented or invisible in policies, within the disability movement and even within national associations of the deaf. By including deaf LGBTQIA+, communities will make diversity among the deaf a reality!

5. **Sunday, 29 September - Sign Language Rights for Deaf Refugees**

Deaf refugees constitute one of the most vulnerable groups among the Deaf Community. In addition to running away from life-threatening situations, deaf refugees are often unaware of the current situation they are facing and the possibilities they have to escape due to the lack of information in sign language. When they settle in refugee camps, they often do not receive information in their sign language. Deaf refugees should benefit from the same fundamental rights to receive information in sign language as other deaf people. In addition, they also have the rights to interact with their direct environment in sign language to receive services such as healthcare, social services on the equal basis with their hearing counterparts. Placing deaf refugees at the forefront of your agenda is ensuring equality among all deaf people!