



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

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

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SUBJECT: RECOGNITION OF ITALIAN SIGN LANGUAGE

This information is available in International Sign via <http://vimeo.com/110754747>

On behalf of the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD), I would like to acknowledge that May 2014 would mark the fifth year the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (UN CRPD) have been in force in Italy.

While this significant milestone signals your government's commitment to protect the rights of persons with disabilities, we must take a critical look at the conflicting realities of perpetual exclusion faced by the Italian Deaf Community due to the non-recognition of Italian Sign Language (LIS). WFD shares Ente Nazionale Sordi's (ENS) concerns of proposals to disregard the official recognition of the Italian Sign Language. Unless steps are taken, this exclusion will pose grave and systematic violation of the CRPD.

Contrary to false claims, sign language *is* considered as a fully operating language with its own syntax, morphology and structure. It is capable of functioning as a language of communication in all settings from educational to political. This fact has been accepted and enacted into Article 2 of the CRPD, which defines sign languages as equal to spoken languages. In view of this, the LIS should not be considered as any less but instead must be regarded as an integral part of the Italian linguistic and cultural diversity.

Several countries in the world have taken legislative measures to recognise their national sign languages. For instance, European countries such as Austria and Finland have enacted a law in their constitution to recognise their local sign languages. It would be in WFD's best interest that Italy follow into the footsteps of these distinguished group of countries.

With this, the WFD urges the Italian government to work towards the legal recognition of LIS. In doing so, it is important to ensure that the development of national sign languages be in the hands of those who are native sign language users, the Italian deaf community. This philosophical approach was reiterated in [WFD Statement on Sign Language Work](#).

As an organisation representing the interests of the Italian deaf signing community, the Ente Nazionale Sordi has first-hand expertise and knowledge on matters relating to Italian Sign Language and deaf culture. It is important that the Ente Nazionale Sordi is included in any legislative process relating to matters that would directly affect their lives. WFD strongly encourages the Italian government to work in partnership with the Ente Nazionale Sordi and carefully consider their comments and views.

It is hope that through these effective consultations the Italian governmental officials would gain a better understanding of the five articles that have direct reference to deaf people and sign languages (See: [Article 2](#); [Article 9.2.e](#); [Article 21.b](#) and [21.e](#); [Article 24.3b](#) and [24.3.c](#) and [24.4](#); [Article 30.4](#)).

The WFD assures that your efforts to officiate the recognition of LIS would be hailed worldwide.

I wish you success in your endeavours.

Yours sincerely,

Colin Allen

President

World Federation of the Deaf

WFD is established in Rome, Italy in 1951, and is an international non-governmental organisation. It represents and promotes approximately 70 million deaf people's human rights worldwide, out of which around more than 50% of our members are from the developing countries. Its membership comprised of Individual Members, Associate Members, eight Regional Secretariats, as well as 134 Ordinary Members. WFD's office is located in Helsinki, Finland.

WFD has consultative status in the UN, including the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC); the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Council of Europe (CoE).