

The Vancouver 2010 Resolution: A New Era of Deaf Participation and Collaboration

Preamble

Many Deaf citizens around the world encounter a perception that being Deaf is considered a disability from nondisabled persons on a daily basis. The perception of being Deaf as a disability will prevail so long as it is treated as such by people throughout in many nations. This mindset also contributes directly and indirectly towards the exclusion and devaluation of all citizens who are “different” including Deaf citizens. However, in the view of a vast majority of Deaf citizens throughout the world, it is an inalienable belief and right to be a linguistic and cultural entity to be cherished by all. The Deaf culture is essentially a component of any society which enhances and embraces diversity, creativity and contributions to its economy, politics, arts and literature, and all other aspects that defines a society. Many Deaf citizens desire and thrive to contribute immeasurably to their nations, but the only way this will happen is if being Deaf and having Deaf cultures are respected. Nations are asked to involve their Deaf citizens in planning for a benevolent society.

The resolutions of the 1880 Milan Congress:

- Effectively removed the use of sign languages from schools for the Deaf around the world;
- Contributed detrimentally to the lives of Deaf citizens around the world;
- Led to the exclusion of Deaf citizens in educational policy and planning in most jurisdictions of the world;
- Prevented Deaf citizens from participation in governmental planning, decision-making, and funding in areas of employment training, retraining and other aspects of career planning;
- Hindered the abilities of Deaf citizens to succeed in various careers and have prevented many of them from following their own aspirations; and
- Prevented the opportunity for Deaf citizens to demonstrate their cultural and artistic contributions to the diversity of each Nation.

Let it be resolved that the international educators of the deaf in convention at the International Congress of Education of the Deaf in the City of Vancouver in July 2010:

- reject all resolutions passed at the Milan Congress in 1880;
- acknowledge the detrimental effects of the Milan resolutions and express their remorse for not having rejected them in the past;
- endorse the resolution adopted by the World Federation of the Deaf at its 15th Congress in Madrid in 2007;
- call upon the Nations of the world to ratify and adhere to the Principles of the United Nations, specifically those outlined in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
- call upon the Nations to include the sign languages of their Deaf citizens as official languages of these Nations and to treat them as equal languages as those of the hearing majority;
- call upon the Nations to cease repression of the Deaf citizens and to facilitate and enhance and embrace their participation in all governmental decision-making processes affecting all aspects of their lives;
- call upon the Nations to involve their Deaf citizens to assist parents of Deaf babies and children in the appreciation of the Deaf culture and sign languages instead of solely focussing upon the medical and audistic aspects of being Deaf;
- call upon the Nations to make every effort to ensure that their Deaf citizens obtain information about their human rights; and
- Call upon the Nations of the world to recognize and allow Deaf citizens to be proud, confident, productive, creative and enabling citizens in their respective Nations.

This Expression of Apology is accompanied by the following clarifying explanations and definitions:

1. Our Perception

- 1.1. Deaf children are inherently and unavoidably bilingual. The innate bilingual characteristics of the Deaf children must be nurtured in order to succeed in education and in society. Furthermore, curricular programmes for Deaf children need to be identical to those for nondisabled children.
- 1.2. Professionals and parents of Deaf children do not have any choice as to what communication methods are the best for them. Deaf children have a right to the full use of two languages: one being the language of the nondisabled majority and the other being a sign language. Deaf children should be permitted to experiment and experience and use whichever languages they choose to try as they progress to their adulthood.
- 1.3. Nondisabled persons have no rights that are superior to those with disabilities.
- 1.4. Although it is perceived as a disability, being Deaf is a cultural asset and must be cherished and nurtured. Deaf children have a right to be exposed to Deaf history and culture curricular programmes in their schools. The “disability” status needs to be substantially minimized for purposes of educational enhancement and advancement.
- 1.5. “The removal of barriers for Deaf ... people to enjoy full participation in society”, as urged by the New Zealand Human Rights Commissioner, needs to be done.
- 1.6. The 1880 Milan resolutions have created a mindset of the public which has had very dire consequences for the Deaf in terms of education, employment, culture, et cetera. Removal of these resolutions will enable the change of the mindset that will greatly enhance understanding and appreciation of multiculturalism around the world.
- 1.7. Deaf participation in governmental policy-making and decision processes will enhance employability of the Deaf, improve educational quality, and increase the quality of lives of Deaf citizens and decrease their Nations’ financial burdens.

2. Selected excerpts from the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (see one of the UN’s links to the New Zealand Sign Language version, <http://www.odi.govt.nz/nzsl-video/un-convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>):

- 2.1. Article 17: Every person with disabilities has a right to respect for his or her physical and mental integrity on an equal basis with others.
- 2.2. Article 19: States Parties to the present Convention recognize the equal right of all persons with disabilities to live in the community, with choices equal to others, and shall take effective and appropriate measures to facilitate full enjoyment by persons with disabilities of this right and their full inclusion and participation in the community, including by ensuring that:
 - 2.2.1. Persons with disabilities have access to a range of in-home, residential and other community support services, including personal assistance necessary to support living and inclusion in the community, and to prevent isolation or segregation from the community;
 - 2.2.2. Community services and facilities for the general population are available on an equal basis to persons with disabilities and are responsive to their needs.
- 2.3. Article 24: States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning directed to:

- 2.3.1. The full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity;
 - 2.3.2. The development by persons with disabilities of their personality, talents and creativity, as well as their mental and physical abilities, to their fullest potential;
 - 2.3.3. Enabling persons with disabilities to participate effectively in a free society.
- 2.4. Article 24: States Parties shall enable persons with disabilities to learn life and social development skills to facilitate their full and equal participation in education and as members of the community. To this end, States Parties shall take appropriate measures, including:
- 2.4.1. Facilitating the learning of sign language and the promotion of the linguistic identity of the deaf community;
 - 2.4.2. Ensuring that the education of persons, and in particular children, who are blind, deaf or deafblind, is delivered in the most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication for the individual, and in environments which maximize academic and social development.
- 2.5. Article 27: States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities. States Parties shall safeguard and promote the realization of the right to work, including for those who acquire a disability during the course of employment, by taking appropriate steps, including through legislation, to, inter alia:
- 2.5.1. Prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability with regard to all matters concerning all forms of employment, including conditions of recruitment, hiring and employment, continuance of employment, career advancement and safe and healthy working conditions;
 - 2.5.2. Protect the rights of persons with disabilities, on an equal basis with others, to just and favourable conditions of work, including equal opportunities and equal remuneration for work of equal value, safe and healthy working conditions, including protection from harassment, and the redress of grievances;
 - 2.5.3. Ensure that persons with disabilities are able to exercise their labour and trade union rights on an equal basis with others;
 - 2.5.4. Enable persons with disabilities to have effective access to general technical and vocational guidance programmes, placement services and vocational and continuing training;
 - 2.5.5. Promote employment opportunities and career advancement for persons with disabilities in the labour market, as well as assistance in finding, obtaining, maintaining and returning to employment;
 - 2.5.6. Promote opportunities for self-employment, entrepreneurship, the development of cooperatives and starting one's own business;
 - 2.5.7. Employ persons with disabilities in the public sector;
 - 2.5.8. Promote the employment of persons with disabilities in the private sector through appropriate policies and measures, which may include affirmative action programmes, incentives and other measures;
 - 2.5.9. Ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided to persons with disabilities in the workplace;
 - 2.5.10. Promote the acquisition by persons with disabilities of work experience in the open labour market;
 - 2.5.11. Promote vocational and professional rehabilitation, job retention and return-to-work programmes for persons with disabilities.

3. Resolution of the 15th World Congress of the World Federation of the Deaf

CONGRESS RESOLUTION

15TH WORLD CONGRESS OF THE WORLD FEDERATION OF THE DEAF

16-22 July 2007, Madrid, Spain

The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD), its Members and the participants at the 15th World Congress of the World Federation of the Deaf in Madrid, Spain, 16-22 July 2007,

Reaffirming that deaf people are entitled to the same human rights as all social groups and that diversity is an intrinsic factor in the Deaf Community,

Recognising the importance of children and youth; deafblind; deaf with disabilities; immigrants; Indigenous peoples; Lesbians, Gays, Transgenders and Bisexuals; people in rural areas; religious minorities; senior citizens; and all deaf people as citizens of society with the same rights and obligations as other citizens,

Emphasising that by adopting positive actions, equality among all will be accelerated,

Emphasising that sign language is a human right for all members of the Deaf Community, including those who use assistive devices and implants,

Reaffirming that multi-lingual education in sign language gives deaf and hard of hearing people the best opportunity to achieve full citizenship and enjoyment of all human rights,

Have agreed that WFD and its Members:

- Have an obligation to work together to promote government ratification and implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities thus assuring deaf people full attainment of all human rights on an equal basis with other citizens.
- Must work together as a collective group, and those from developed countries must work in close partnership with those from developing countries.
- Must adopt measures to educate and to sensitise the Deaf Community about the diverse variety of peoples and cultures within the larger Deaf culture.
- Must promote gender-equality programmes and policies to ensure the full development and empowerment of women, and adopt measures that combat violence and abuse against deaf women.
- Have responsibility to preserve, promote and protect sign languages and cultural heritages; and to formulate language policies to empower sign language, including indigenous sign languages.
- Have obligation to co-operate closely with schools and educational authorities to promote deaf children's right to receive a multi-lingual/multi-cultural education and to implement training programmes to develop healthy identities for all deaf children, their families and CODA children.
- Should also protect the rights of children with cochlear implants and other sensory modification technologies to an education in sign language.
- Are responsible to sanction the employment of Deaf professionals in all fields that have an impact on the lives of Deaf people.

- Must promote the development of appropriate training programmes and qualifications for sign language interpreters, and follow WFD principles of co-operation with interpreters.
- Must incorporate the principles of consistent application of universal design with technological innovations of new products and services.
- Must formulate a statement of Deaf bioethics concerns and priorities, and quality medical and surgical care for deaf people, based on human rights principles.
- Have obligation to establish mentorship and positive leadership programmes for deaf youth, and involve them actively in political decision-making and implementation.
- Have responsibility to promote employment and self-sufficiency through Deaf economic empowerment.
- Are responsible to promote equal access to mental health services for all deaf people.

Programmes and actions developed by WFD and its OMs must take account of all deaf people. Special attention should be given to education in both developed and developing countries in order to eliminate any further disadvantage, which brings as a consequence unemployment, poverty, poor health and the lack of self-determination.

Education for deaf people, especially in developing countries, must be an initiative of Deaf persons from that country in order to include and impart their native sign language(s) and culture.

The linguistic and cultural rights of deaf immigrants must be respected as well as assistance provided in learning the language and culture of their new country.

Sign language interpreters are a fundamental resource in achieving human rights and full access. The term sign language interpreter is a concept inclusive not only of hearing sign language interpreters but also Deaf sign language interpreters and interpreter guides for deafblind people.

Technology and e-learning offer access to information are vital for structured and informal learning and promote independency. The principles of universal design will ensure full communication access and fulfilment of deaf persons' human rights.

Equal and appropriate access to mental health services, through sign language and Deaf culture and by the provisioning of Deaf professional staff, is a basic human right of deaf people.

In reference to the growing demographic of an aging population, attention must be given to programmes and services for deaf senior citizens.

Sign languages serve as vital instruments to transmit culture and knowledge. The status and recognition of sign languages around the world will be strengthened through language policies, research and the preservation of and the teaching of sign languages. Sign languages should be a part of all national curricula.

*The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD), its Members and the participants at the 15th World Congress of the World Federation of the Deaf agree to promote and implement this Congress Resolution to all governments and authorities, demanding respect for the realisation of **HUMAN RIGHTS THROUGH SIGN LANGUAGES** .*

4. **Some Effects of the Milan Decisions:**

- 4.1. Reduction in number of Deaf professionals instructing at schools for the deaf and at university teacher-training programs around the world;
- 4.2. Suppression of sign language use in many school settings;
- 4.3. An emphasis on speech production at the expense of education;
- 4.4. Acceptance of deafness as a “disability” and that of a mindset that views deafness as an incapacity to be cured, instead of cherishing the Deaf cultures around the world;
- 4.5. Exclusion of Deaf people from full functional participation in the broader society as citizens, including, to identify a few existing or past instances,
 - 4.5.1. Denial of driver’s licences to deaf people in the 20th century;
 - 4.5.2. Denial of adoption of babies and children by deaf adults in numerous countries;
 - 4.5.3. Refusal to provide interpreters in a school setting and in numerous other settings;
 - 4.5.4. Non-issuance of life insurance policies to the Deaf; and
 - 4.5.5. Widespread incidence of “undereducation” of the Deaf around the world;
 - 4.5.6. Denial of human rights and equality of the Deaf;
 - 4.5.7. Continued high rate of unemployment and underemployment of Deaf citizens;
 - 4.5.8. Exclusion of Deaf citizens from governmental bodies that develop policies impacting Deaf children and citizens;
 - 4.5.9. Nearly non-existing public awareness of Deaf abilities;
 - 4.5.10. Actual decline in quality of education for the deaf;
 - 4.5.11. Loss of Deaf contributions to the economies around the world;
 - 4.5.12. Loss of creativity in teaching deaf children;
 - 4.5.13. Mismanagement of early identification/intervention of deaf babies.

5. **Milan Resolutions** (see <http://www.milan1880.com/milan1880congress/eightresolutions.html>):

- 5.1. Resolution 1: Considering the incontestable superiority of speech over signs in restoring the deaf-mute to society, and in giving him a more perfect knowledge of language, Declares – That the Oral method ought to be preferred that of signs for the education and instruction of the deaf and dumb.
- 5.2. Resolution 2: Considering that the simultaneous use of speech and signs has the disadvantage of injuring speech, lip-reading and precision of ideas, Declares – That the Pure Oral method ought to be preferred.
- 5.3. Resolution 3: Considering that a great number of the deaf and dumb are not receiving the benefit of instruction, and that this condition is owing to the "impotence" (impotenza) of families and of institutions, Recommends –That Governments should take the necessary steps that all the deaf and dumb may be educated.
- 5.4. Resolution 4: Considering that the teaching of the speaking deaf by the Pure Oral method should resemble as much as possible that of those who hear and speak, Declares –
 - 5.4.1. That the most natural and effectual means by which the speaking deaf may acquire the knowledge of language is the "intuitive" method, viz., that which consists in setting forth, first by speech, and then by writing the objects and the facts which are placed before the eyes of the pupils.
 - 5.4.2. That in the first, or maternal, period the deaf-mute ought to be led to the observation of grammatical forms by means of examples and of practical exercises, and that in the second period he ought to be assisted to deduce from these examples the grammatical rules, expressed with the utmost simplicity and clearness.

- 5.4.3. That books, written with words and in forms of language known to the pupil, can be put into his hands at any time.
- 5.5. Resolution 5: Considering the want of books sufficiently elementary to help the gradual and progressive development of language, Recommends – That the teachers of the Oral system should apply themselves to the publication of special works on the subject.
- 5.6. Resolution 6: Considering the results obtained by the numerous inquiries made concerning the deaf and dumb of every age and every condition long after they had quitted school, who, when interrogated upon various subjects, have answered correctly, with sufficient clearness of articulation, and read the lips of their questioners with the greatest facility, Declares –
- 5.6.1. That the deaf and dumb taught by the Pure Oral method do not forget after leaving school the knowledge which they have acquired there, but develop it still further by conversation and reading, when have been made so easy for them.
- 5.6.2. That in their conversation with speaking persons they make use exclusively of speech.
- 5.6.3. That speech and lip-reading so far from being lost, are developed by practice.
- 5.7. Resolution 7: Considering that the education of the deaf and dumb by speech has peculiar requirements; considering also that the experienced of teachers of deaf-mutes is almost unanimous, Declares –
- 5.7.1. That the most favourable age for admitting a deaf child into school is from eight to ten years.
- 5.7.2. That the school term ought to be seven years at least; but eight years would be preferable.
- 5.7.3. That no teacher can effectually teach a class of more than ten children on the Pure Oral method.
- 5.8. Resolution 8: Considering that the application of the Pure Oral method in institutions where it is not yet in active operation, should be – to avoid the certainty of failure – prudent, gradual, progressive, Recommends –
- 5.8.1. That the pupils newly received into the schools should form a class by themselves, where instruction could be given by speech.
- 5.8.2. That these pupils should be absolutely separated from others too far advanced to be instructed by speech, and whose education will be completed by signs.
- 5.8.3. That each year a new speaking class be established, with all the old pupils taught by signs have completed their education.
- 6. Definitions**
- 6.1. *Audistic* derived from audism: “The notion that one is superior based on one’s ability to hear or behave in the manner of one who hears.” – Tom Humphries. It is a form of discrimination.
- 6.2. *Bilingual*: using or able to use two languages especially with equal fluency (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bilingual>.) According to Dr. Susan Gregory of the University of Birmingham, “Bilingual education is an approach to the education of deaf children which uses both the sign language of the deaf community and the written/spoken language of the hearing community.” (See <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/000000306.htm>.)
- 6.3. *Deaf culture*: the social movement that holds deafness to be a difference in human experience rather than a disability (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deaf_culture)
- 6.4. *Institutions* (see 5.3 under *Milan Resolutions* above): public schools
- 6.5. *Mindset*: a fixed mental attitude or disposition that predetermines a person's responses to and interpretations of situations (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/mindset>); a mental attitude or inclination (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mindset>)