



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, FIN-00401 Helsinki, FINLAND

FAX: +358 9 5803 572

www.wfdeaf.org

Press Release

World Federation of the Deaf signed historic agreement with North Korean disability organisation

World Federation of the Deaf has, as the first international disability organisation, signed a Memorandum of Understanding for cooperation with the North Korean disability organisation today in Helsinki, Finland.

Mr Colin Allen, President of the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD), an international disability NGO based in Helsinki, and Mr Ri Kwang Son, the Executive Director of the Korean Federation for the Protection of the Disabled (KFPD) representing persons with disabilities in DPR Korea (North Korea) signed the historic Memorandum of Understanding at a meeting hosted by WFD together with the Finnish Association of the Deaf this afternoon in Helsinki, Finland.

The document signed today recognises that strengthening the cooperation between the two organisations will bring mutual benefit to both parties and also to the world deaf community. It aims to develop cooperation between the two organisations with the view of further improving the living conditions and equal opportunities of deaf people in all fields including deaf education, deaf culture, arts and deaf sports.

By sharing its expertise and information WFD directly encourages and supports these processes thus contributing to the development of opportunities for the deaf and of the civil society as a whole in the country.

The document signed today is the first step for the deaf North Koreans to join the world deaf community as WFD and KFPD combine their efforts to facilitate and promote the foundation of a National Association of the Deaf in DPR Korea (North Korea).

The Memorandum of Understanding is the result of over four years of developing understanding by exchanging experiences in deaf work and following a jointly-set agenda while also paying tribute to the articles and the spirit of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The former president of WFD, Mr. Markku Jokinen accompanied by the then president of the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters, Ms Liz Gibson, paid the first official visit to North Korea in July 2010. Furthermore WFD and KFPD have also co-organised international "GOOD FELLOWSHIP" deaf meetings in Pyongyang since 2009. The next meeting will be organised in summer 2012.

The document signed today marks the momentous beginning for the two organisations and it has been welcomed by both parties as an important step towards further future collaboration. Both KFPD and WFD will continue working with the German NGO TOGETHER – Educational Center for Deaf, Blind, and Nondisabled Children Hamhung e.V. which has played an important role in initiating and facilitating cooperation between the two organisations.

The Finnish Secretary of State, Mr. Pertti Torstila, addressed the signing ceremony on behalf of the Foreign Minister Erkki Tuomioja, congratulating the two organisations on the important milestone and emphasising the value of direct contacts with the North Korean civil society.

For interview requests and more information please contact,
Heidi-Maria Helenius, WFD Liaison Officer
heidi-maria.helenius@kl-deaf.fi +358 50 4388 370