



*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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## **INTERNATIONAL SIGN INTERPRETATION AT UNITED NATIONS MEETINGS**

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Whenever planning international events, all efforts should be made to communicate with the delegates well in advance in order to arrange the most linguistically appropriate services.

International Sign (IS) is the result of contact between different sign languages and is therefore not a full language, It does not always convey the richness of meaning that can be expressed in a full language, nor is it as efficient as a natural language. However, IS has evolved naturally over the past century to serve deaf people who have become more active in international co-operation. IS has certainly been used when there is no option of providing interpreting services in every national sign language represented at a meeting, and it has proven very effective when the participants from different countries meet in conferences where the vocabulary has become fairly conventionalized. Deaf people who attend United Nations meetings often have a working knowledge of written English, though it may be their third, fourth, or fifth language.

For IS interpreters, there is no international certification/accreditation system yet in place. Currently, a task force has been set up to assist World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) and World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI) to prepare an accreditation system for IS interpreters. Until that is in place, WFD and WASLI can assist in identifying professional interpreters with international experience. Not all interpreters who have previously interpreted in IS are suitable for UN level meetings. In the spirit of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, no decision should be made without consultation with persons with disabilities. Again, the WFD, and the WASLI will be of invaluable assistance in finding the appropriate interpreters for UN level meetings.

In booking IS interpreters, it should be noted that few of the vendors will understand the qualifications necessary for an IS interpreter. It is almost always necessary to ask the advice of the WFD and WASLI which IS interpreters in the country or region might be skilled enough for the assignment. There is a general shortage of sign language interpreters worldwide, which means that qualified interpreters are likely to be fully booked well in advance. In New York, there is a very limited pool of interpreters who are skilled in IS, and some may have to be brought in from other states or from Europe; in Geneva, skilled IS interpreters will have to be brought in from other countries in Europe.

Articles 9.2(e) and 21(b) of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities highlight the importance of ensuring accessibility by providing professional sign language interpreters and facilitating the use of sign languages.

As the organisation behind the CRPD, the Secretariat and Agencies of the UN are in a position to lead the way in modelling proper provision of interpreting services at all levels of the UN system.

For more information:

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