

Submission of the Statement to the Ninth Pre-Sessional Working Group

Statement by the National Federation for Deaf Algerians

January 26th, 2018

Introduction

This Statement report has been made possible after the participation by four Deaf Algerian participants in a human rights training project for Deaf communities in the Arab Maghreb region which was organized and conducted by the World Federation for the Deaf and funded by the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Deaf Algerians' participation at the human rights training program contributed to their increased knowledge of human rights and CRPD and they, in turn, disseminated information to individuals and members of the Algerian Deaf community – which, in turn, lead to the creation of this statement report. Although this Statement has been produced by a rather small number of Deaf Algerians, some of them being members of the National Federation for Deaf Algerians, it accurately illustrates the reality of the situation most Deaf Algerians are in.

This Statement report is purposed to influence the works of the CRPD Committee to compile a list of LOIs that are to be addressed to the State Party of Algeria. The goal is to raise the most important issues that demand immediate attention and bring the attention of the Algerian government to these issues and to call for action through close and concrete cooperation between the Algerian government and the Algerian Deaf community.

About this Statement

1. This Statement represents the views of the Algerian Deaf community in regard to the extent of the implementation of CRPD. Also, this Statement provides basic and relevant information to the CRPD committee regarding the general situation the Algerian Deaf people are in. Despite the fact that this Statement does not contain the required statistical information, it does accurately illustrate the reality of the situation of Deaf Algerians and it is hoped that the information provided below will be of great benefit to the pre-sessional working group who will be working with the CRPD Committee for the purpose of creating LOIs and submitting it to the State Party of Algeria.
2. Algeria has seen a number of considerably important achievements when it comes to supporting the rights of persons with disabilities, including Deaf persons. However, there is a long way to go before full inclusion has been achieved for Deaf persons. The Algerian Deaf community is eagerly seeking to work with the Algerian government to improve the general situation of Deaf persons there, children and adults.
3. It is crucial for the Algerian government and its concerned agencies and bodies to guarantee and ensure full participation by persons with disabilities when it comes to discussing national strategies concerning persons with disabilities and that the Algerian Deaf community play a significant role in decision-making regarding issues concerning them.

Article 6: Women with Disabilities

4. While there are initiatives by the Algerian government and civil society organizations to promote awareness about women's rights, including women with disabilities. However, the reality indicates that, in general, Deaf women are not equal to hearing women and even so Deaf women are not equal to hearing women with physical or visual disabilities. Many Algerian families appear to be over-protective of their Deaf female family members and they would keep those Deaf girls and women at home. Rarely do they allow those Deaf women pursue higher education and it is extremely common for Deaf girls to complete half of their education (or a little more or less), drop out of school, take vocational training courses, and then remain "grounded" at home. It is rare for Deaf women to find a decent job without being subjected to exploitation and abuse at workplace. The low-quality Deaf education in Algeria is the major factor that has played a role in "de-empowering" Deaf women and girls.
5. It is urgent that the Algerian government work with DPOs to promote and increase parental acceptance towards the importance of role play by Deaf women in the Algerian community. Also, the Algerian government has the responsibility to achieve equality between Deaf women and hearing ones in many aspects of life. Also, the Algerian government needs to implement effective measures to aggressively combat all kinds of discrimination and abuse being practiced against women with disabilities at workplace.

Article 7: Children with Disabilities

6. There are countless of incidents concerning Deaf children who are being subjected to physical and emotional abuses at certain schools for the Deaf. The situation is very hard on them, especially if they are in an-unfriendly environment. For example, being mainstreamed into regular schools where appropriate services are lacking. Several Deaf witnesses claim that some employees of the Ministry of National Solidarity were aware of these incidents but it is unknown if the Ministry has begun investigation to deal with these incidents and prevent them from happening again.
7. Needless to say, the government has the responsibility to implement the required mechanisms and measures to ensure that Deaf children at all schools for the Deaf, including mainstream schools, are being properly treated as equals and that they are receiving quality education alike others.

Article 8: Awareness-raising

8. While the Algerian Deaf community appreciates the efforts that are being exerted by the Algerian government to support persons with disabilities, it has been noted that in the State Party of Algeria's 2015 initial report in French to the CRPD Committee, the word 'mute' had been used thirteen times. It needs to be noted that the word 'mute' is a discriminatory word, for it negatively portrays Deaf persons. It calls for a reason to express concern. There is already realization that the Article 8 of the CRPD needs to be well-implemented and that it cannot be effectively implemented without the Algerian government's genuine

understanding towards Deaf culture and accepting the fact that the Algerian Deaf community is a minority within the Algerian community.

9. The Algerian Deaf community expresses appreciation towards the Algerian government for their efforts to support persons with disabilities and achieve full inclusion. However, it is essential that the identity and integrity of the Algerian Deaf community must be respected and preserved and that the realization of the full participation and empowerment of the Algerian Deaf community is to be achieved at the fullest.
10. It is rare to see the Algerian media putting spotlight on Deaf persons to recognize their efforts and achievements as an effort to positively portray Deaf persons. It is important that both the Algerian government and leading organizations by Deaf persons make efforts to recognize such efforts and achievements and that they take this action on a continuous basis.
11. There are sign languages courses being conducted in and around Algeria. It is estimated that there are up to about fifteen Deaf sign language instructors and they are likely to be outnumbered by hearing persons who teach sign language (and those hearing persons are the ones who had learned sign language from the Deaf sign language instructors who are part of the Algerian Deaf community). Sign language courses were provided to government and court employees, members of the National People's Assembly, police and political officials, and others (*See State Party Algeria's initial report (page 40, Paragraph 281 concerning CRPD's Article 30: Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport*). These sign language courses were supported by the Ministry of Solidarity and the courses were conducted and led by hearing persons with low participation by Deaf sign language instructors. There is concern that certain hearing sign language instructors are not keen in working with Deaf sign language instructors and believing that Deaf persons should lead sign language works.
12. The Ministry of National Solidarity, Family, and Women's Issues was active in supporting the production of the dictionary of Algerian Sign Language which was published in 2017. However, only up to nine Deaf persons were involved while the vast majority of the participants were hearing. Several Deaf participants, whose names were not included in the dictionary, participated in meetings to review the contents of the dictionary and they challenged other hearing participants because of some mistakes that were made in it. As a result, those Deaf persons (who have the potential to play an effective role to support the Algerian Deaf community) were excluded from the project. In this kind of situation, it appears that hearing people often take the leading role in sign language works.
13. Therefore, it is very important that sign language works are to be led by Deaf persons themselves and that stakeholders (i.e., government, teachers, sign language interpreters, professionals who work with Deaf persons, and others) play a positive, supporting role in supporting sign language works.

Article 9: Accessibility

14. Although there is no national program to certify, evaluate, and monitor sign language interpreters, it is not possible to determine how many unlicensed sign language interpreters there are. It is safe to estimate that the vast majority of them do not possess the professional competency in sign language and interpretation performance.

15. It is unfortunate to note that there are countless incidents of Deaf persons being subjected to receiving unprofessional sign language interpreting services. In many cases, which are unfortunately very common, sign language interpreters would perform at their own full discretion, with full disregard to codes of ethics and Deaf culture, on how they would do the interpreting works. In some cases, they would not be accurate in translation but they would add far more words (that is, exaggeration) to do the cajoling in order to achieve what was needed for their Deaf clients – often in the name of pity. Many Deaf persons perceive sign language interpreters as “oppressors” because some sign language interpreters behave as if they are trying to dominate the Deaf community there.
16. In reality, sign language interpreters in Algeria play a powerful role, being an “intermediary” between the Algerian government and the Algerian Deaf community. There is serious concern that the Algerian government looks up to sign language interpreters for guidance instead of communicating and consulting directly with members of the Algerian Deaf community. As long as it continues, the Algerian Deaf community may continue to face undue challenges and obstacles to become independent and empowered.
17. It is safe to confirm that the low-quality Deaf Education in Algeria has a grave negative impact on the lives of Deaf persons, for they could not – after many years at school – achieve an acceptable level of competency in Arabic and French which would have them liberated and empowered. As a result, many Deaf Algerians find themselves “powerless” in confronting certain sign language interpreters who act unprofessionally and unethically.
18. The reason why some Deaf organizations have not yet challenged those sign language interpreters is probably that they feared retaliation and also because of their dependence on sign language interpreters to get things that are need to be done. Another factor is that they are not armed with knowledge of human rights and CRPD, which would have empowered them and enabled them to defend for themselves. Furthermore, there is concern that policies and regulations to effectively and impartially handle complaints concerning the quality of sign language interpreting services are non-existent.
19. Many Deaf persons would have to pay fee to sign language interpreters in exchange for interpreting services. The worrying part here is that those fees are being paid without supervision and no one has an idea how much did those Deaf clients pay, considering the fact that a vast majority of the sign language interpreters are not professionally qualified.
20. News in several government-owned TV channels are being interpreted in Algerian Sign Language. Sermons at mosques are translated into Algerian Sign Language. Private TV channels, sometimes but rather on an irregular basis, provide on-screen sign language interpreters to interpret some TV programs. TV morning talk shows sometimes provide on-screen sign language interpretation. Most of the sign language interpreters do not possess the required competency in sign language interpretation and none of them are certified. No one, even the government, has consulted with the Algerian Deaf community to select a sign language interpreter (to ensure that he is skilled and qualified and has the required competency) to do the interpreting job on screen. Some of them displayed limited sign vocabulary and were not expanding it and some provided incomprehensible interpreting works. Only a small number of them have good signing skills.
21. The reason of the prevalence of unprofessional sign language interpreting works is mainly due to the absence of policies, regulations, and code of ethics that could have been enforced and implemented to ensure high-quality sign language interpreting works.
22. There are no video relay services available for the Deaf people in Algeria.

23. The Algerian Deaf community wishes to make it very clear that they recognize the importance of sign language interpreters, for they play a major role in achieving accessibility to information and services. The Algerian Deaf community strongly believes that there needs to be equality between the Algerian Deaf community and sign language interpreters and that they all work together to achieve the following desired goals: a high-quality sign language interpreting services for all Deaf persons and achieving full accessibility to information and services for the Deaf.

Article 15: Freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

24. There are countless incidents in which Deaf children are subjected to undergoing cochlea implant surgery, one of them fatal. There is great concern that those Deaf children were not properly consulted before undergoing cochlea implant. It is possible that some doctors may have convinced parents of Deaf children that it would be a solution to deafness while in fact cochlea implant can never ever restore normal hearing. There needs to be greater awareness of what a cochlea implant can do AND can't do and that Deaf children should be given proper choices and that they are properly consulted, taking into consideration the availability of services related to dealing with deafness and one of these choices must include sign language. In closing to this paragraph, Article 15 of CRPD explicitly states:
- a. " 1. No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. In particular, no one shall be subjected without his or her free consent to medical or scientific experimentation."

Article 21: Freedom of expression and opinion and access to information

25. The Algerian Government has not yet recognized Algerian Sign Language as the official language of the Algerian Deaf community which is indeed a minority community within the Algerian community.
26. Many Deaf persons, especially those whose literacy skills are low, face challenges in having full access to information inside websites of Algerian government institutions and private ones. These contents are not translated into Algerian Deaf community.
27. There are no on-screen TV subtitling services for the Deaf and hard-of-hearing. That is, Arabic-speaking programs are not subtitled in Arabic and the same for French-speaking programs.
28. The Algerian Deaf community is urgently requesting the Algerian government and media institutions to fully implement Article 21 of the CRPD to ensure that the Algerian Deaf community have full access to information that are made publicly available to the general population.

Article 24: Education

29. There are a little more than twenty schools for the Deaf, functioning under the auspices of the Ministry of National Solidarity.

30. The vast majority of Deaf students studying beyond the do not possess the required proficiency in Arabic and French. Hence, there is serious concern that bilingualism education is failing or it has not been properly implemented at all.
31. There is a very small number of Deaf students have graduated from high school and pursued higher education while the vast majority of students have dropped out of school and took vocational education.
32. The vast majority of hearing teachers are not proficient in Algerian Sign Language and not trained to become qualified teachers. As a result, they are unable to perform effective teaching and convey information to their Deaf students to the fullest extent possible.
33. There are very few Deaf teachers and they play a limited role in supporting their schools. They would teach simple subjects such as maths, arts, and computer. Because they are not proficient in French and Arabic, they are not able to play a bigger role such as making decisions regarding their schools or do the supervising job or other tasks that designate them as head teachers or supervisors.
34. There are no Deaf employees at The Ministry of National Solidarity, who could play a significant role in ensuring that quality educational services are being provided to Deaf students. They are the best candidates to work with Deaf students.
35. No specialized curricula or educational resources are available to enable Deaf students to have full access to information. As a result, they are not having the fair opportunity to learn Arabic and French as a foreign language.
36. The vast majority of adult Deaf population did not complete their high school education. This is due to the low-quality Deaf education that has been standing for decades.
37. It is strongly suggested that schools for the Deaf are to be run under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. Deaf students should be treated equal as non-Deaf students and they are to deserve quality education.
38. Deaf Education must be improved and the Algerian government has the responsibility to ensure that education is accessible to all Deaf persons, children and adults. Teachers for the Deaf must be qualified to teach, being competent in Algerian Sign Language and to do the teaching performance to effectively convey information and ideas to Deaf students as it is the case with non-Deaf students. All school directors must be competent in Algerian Sign Language and so are the school staff. The concerned ministry dealing with Deaf schools must have its staff who are qualified and competent in Algerian Sign Language.
39. International cooperation must be sought in order to improve Deaf Education in Algeria and implement bilingualism education to the fullest.

Article 27: Labor and Employment

40. There are countless incidents indicating that Deaf workers have been subjected to different kinds of discrimination at workplace. The same goes for hiring Deaf persons. It is apparent that the lack of adequate Deaf awareness is still prevalent in both private and work sectors and it's a big factor playing a role in unemployment among Deaf persons.
41. It is essential that the concerned government ministries, especially the Ministry of Labor, consult with the leading DPOs within the Algerian Deaf community, as well as other DPOs, to draw policies and regulations to ensure that Deaf persons are treated as equals alike others and that there need to be concerned bodies that are tasked with monitoring the situation of Deaf workers to ensure their safety and well-being in their workplaces, and that

- there need to be bodies that are tasked with handling complaints by workers with disabilities and effectively processing those complaints with all fairness and respect.
42. It is urgently suggested that the quality of vocational education be improved and fully accommodates Deaf persons to meet with their skills and career interests, bearing in mind that there is a growing number of Deaf students leaving school (if system left unimproved) without completing their education.

Article 30: Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport

43. There is a limited variation of sports activities for the Deaf. There are some issues that need to be resolved in the Algerian Deaf community as there are no unified efforts to create a national team of Deaf players in a certain sport to ensure equal geographical representation for all parts of Algeria.
44. It is hoped that the Algerian government and its concerned agencies and bodies work with the Algerian Deaf community to promote awareness about the importance of sports participation and to increase their level of sports participation on the national, regional, and international levels.

Article 32: International Cooperation

45. There is an urgent need to fully implement Article 32 of the CRPD to boost international cooperation for the purpose of building, strengthening, and empowering the Algerian Deaf community. Among the most important issues that need immediate attention: increasing and promoting Deaf awareness on the national level (Deaf culture, sign language, and human rights for Deaf people), improvement of Deaf education and implementing bilingualism, research and development of Algerian Sign Language, sign language interpreting training program, and establishment of nationalized system of licensing and monitoring sign language interpreters.

(end of statement)