

BELFAST STATEMENT
ON MENTAL HEALTH
AND DEAFNESS

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I want to live in a world where mental health services and information about these services are provided in sign language so as to make them accessible to the Deaf community.

Dr. Liisa Kauppinnen

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“The Belfast Statement is an assertion of the rights of all deaf people to be fully included in every aspect of civic life. Many things thoughtlessly and needlessly exclude them. Access to mental health and wellbeing services is their right. The Belfast Statement insists on the fullest vindication of that right. It really is time to hear the voices of deaf people”

MARY MCALEESE
FORMER PRESIDENT OF IRELAND

“The Belfast Statement on Mental Health and Deafness addresses the needs of a mostly un-visible group in our society which is naturally excluded unless specific measures are taken to open the avenues to adequate health care and social participation.”

JOHANNES FELLINGER, MD PD,
DIRECTOR, INSTITUTE FOR NEUROLOGY
OF SENSES AND LANGUAGE
LINZ, AUSTRIA

The Belfast Statement of 2014 (“Statement”) sets out the right to effective communication access in the mental health setting for Deaf, Deafened, Hard of Hearing people and Deafblind people of all ages. This right is enshrined in key international declarations such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Statement was drawn up in close consultation with Deaf people and it reflects their first hand knowledge of the issues that they face in the mental health setting. Michael Schwartz, an eminent lawyer who is himself deaf, oversaw the final draft.

In 2014, the Sixth World Congress on Mental Health and Deafness in Belfast adopted the Statement.¹ It has been endorsed by a number of organisations, including the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD), the European Society on Mental Health and Deafness, the British Deaf Association, Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, Sense/Sense International (Deafblind organisation), and Disability Action (NI). Mary McAleese, former President of Ireland, has also endorsed the Statement.

Dr. Liisa Kauppinnen, WFD Honorary President and the 2013 United Nations Human Rights Awardee, presented the first draft of the Statement at the Sixth World Congress. She encouraged the Statement to be released and distributed to stakeholders concerned about mental health, including the World Health Organisation, governments, non-governmental organisations, national mental health care providers as well as families of those who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Deafblind persons who have mental health issues.

In her remarks at the World Congress, Dr. Kauppinnen stated, “In my view, this Statement contains the basis of our identity: Deaf people’s need for respect of sign language and Deaf culture from the beginning. I want to live in a world where mental health services and information about these services are provided in sign language so as to make them accessible to the Deaf community. It is the responsibility of governments to promote access to services in sign language and they should be reminded of their duties regularly. Deaf persons should be granted the opportunity to communicate in sign language at all stages of their treatment.”

The above also applies for those who are Hard of Hearing, Deafened and Deafblind. Sign language may not be their preferred means of communication. This being the case it is therefore important that mental health services recognise, accept and respect the individual’s preferred means of communication. This includes means of communicating with Deafblind individuals and for others the use of speech-to-text technology.

The Belfast Statement is recommended to anyone who is involved in mental health provision as a clear statement of the issues faced by people who are too easily marginalised.

¹ The 2014 World Congress was organised by the European Society on Mental Health and Deafness (ESMHD), Queen’s University Belfast and the Royal College of Psychiatrists (N.I.).



ON MENTAL HEALTH AND DEAFNESS

THE 6th WORLD CONGRESS ON

MENTAL HEALTH & DEAFNESS, INCLUDING 300 DELEGATES

FROM AROUND THE WORLD, MET IN *Belfast, Northern Ireland,*

FROM *16-19* SEPTEMBER 2014 AND AGREED THE FOLLOWING:

BELFAST STATEMENT ON MENTAL HEALTH AND DEAFNESS

Affirming the right of Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Late Deafened and Deafblind individuals, including adults and children, as per the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), to:

- Equality and non-discrimination;¹
- Accessibility;²
- Equal recognition before the law;³
- Access to justice;⁴
- Liberty and security of the person;⁵
- Freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;⁶
- Freedom from exploitation, violence and abuse;⁷
- Integrity of the person;⁸
- Liberty of movement;⁹
- Independent living and inclusion in community life;¹⁰
- Personal mobility;¹¹
- Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information;¹²
- Respect for privacy;¹³

Affirming the right of Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Late Deafened and Deafblind individuals, including adults and children, to meaningful, effective and equal access to:

- Education;¹⁴
- Health;¹⁵
- Habilitation & rehabilitation;¹⁶
- Work and employment;¹⁷
- Adequate standard of living and social protection;¹⁸
- Participation in political and public life;¹⁹
- Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure & sport;²⁰

RECALLING & REAFFIRMING

- The Worcester, South Africa Declaration of the 2005 World Congress on Mental Health and Deafness;
- The Bad Ischl, Austria Declaration of the 2003 European Society for Mental Health and Deafness; and,
- The Universal Declaration on Linguistic Rights, UNESCO World Conference on Linguistic Rights, Barcelona, Spain, 9 June 1996;

RECALLING & REAFFIRMING

- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol, particularly General Principles (Article 3) & General Obligations (Article 4); and,
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of The Child;

The 6th World Congress on Mental Health and Deafness proclaims that Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Late Deafened and Deafblind people, including adults and children, have a right to:

- Dignity, respect and compassion for the linguistic identity of Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Late Deafened and Deafblind people;
- Effective and timely health care, including equal and effective access to mental health services, that accounts for Deaf culture and linguistic identity;
- Equality under national legislation between people with mental health needs and people with physical health needs when it comes to consent and the refusal of consent to interventions;
- Periodic review of treatment;²¹
- Early assessment and treatment;

- Assessment by a qualified worker equipped with social, linguistic and cultural awareness of, and trained in, the needs of Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Late Deafened and Deafblind people;
- Mental health services respecting the needs and wishes of the individual;
- Mental health services that recognise, accept and respect the individual's preferred means of communication including sign language and speech-to-text technology;
- Mental health services that are person-centred, transparent and accountable;
- Mental health services that recognise, accept and respect the role of carers, family and friends;
- Full, equal and effective participation by the individual in the planning of the programme of care; and,
- Communication between the parties in the health care setting in a language modality of the individual's preference.²²

As stated in Section seven of the Congress Resolution at the XVI World Congress of the World Federation of the Deaf (July 2011), the WFD strongly urges the promotion and development of access to mental health services for deaf children, youth, adults and the elderly, and to initiate and encourage research into appropriate and effective mental health models for deaf populations.

The 6th World Congress on Mental Health and Deafness thereby calls on governments, non-government organisations, mental health care providers and other interested stakeholders to:

- Prioritise and promote the right of Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Late Deafened and Deafblind people to recognition of their linguistic and cultural identity as early as possible to preserve and protect their mental health;
- Prioritise and promote the accessibility of mental health services for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Late Deafened and Deafblind people;
- Prioritise and promote the right to effective communication access in the mental health care setting from an early age;
- Develop evidence-based standards in mental health care practice and early intervention for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Late Deafened and Deafblind people;
- Develop demonstration projects in the provision of mental health care services planned and directed by Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Late Deafened, and Deafblind people;
- Encourage the sharing of best practices in mental health care services for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Late Deafened and Deafblind people;
- Repeal laws that discriminate against people with mental health needs by allowing only people with physical health needs to refuse treatment; and
- Promote the development of specialist mental health care services that are culturally and linguistically appropriate and accessible for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Late Deafened and Deafblind people.

SIGNED ON BEHALF OF 6TH WORLD CONGRESS DELEGATES BY

DR LIISA KAUPPINEN
HON. PRESIDENT, WORLD FEDERATION OF THE DEAF (WFD) AND UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS AWARDEE (FINLAND)

DR TERRY RILEY OBE
CHAIR OF THE BRITISH DEAF ASSOCIATION AND BOARD MEMBER OF THE WORLD FEDERATION OF THE DEAF (WFD) (UNITED KINGDOM)

DR. MICHAEL SCHWARTZ
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF LAW, SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY (USA)

DR. INES SLEETBOOM-VAN-RAALJ
CONSULTANT PSYCHIATRIST, PRESIDENT OF THE ESMHD, CO-PRESIDENT WORLD CONGRESS 2014 (THE NETHERLANDS)

BRIAN SYMINGTON
PRESIDENT, WORLD CONGRESS 2014 (NORTHERN IRELAND)

STEFANIA FADDA
PSYCHOLOGIST / PSYCHOTHERAPIST AND PRESIDENT OF ESMHD FROM 2018 (ITALY)

LES ALLAMBY
CHIEF COMMISSIONER, NORTHERN IRELAND HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION (NORTHERN IRELAND)

ENDORSED BY



¹ UN CRPD Article 5 ⁵ UN CRPD Article 14 the Rights of the UN CRC Article 19 ¹² UN CRPD Article 21 ¹⁵ UN CRPD Article 25 ¹⁹ UN CRPD Article 29 Universal Declaration on
² UN CRPD Article 9 ⁶ UN CRPD Article 15 Child (hereinafter ⁹ UN CRPD Article 18 ¹³ UN CRPD Article 22 ¹⁶ UN CRPD Article 26 ²⁰ UN CRPD Article 30 Linguistic Rights, UNESCO
³ UN CRPD Article 12 ⁷ UN CRPD Article 16; UN CRC) Article 19 ¹⁰ UN CRPD Article 19 ¹⁴ UN CRPD Article 16 ¹⁷ UN CRPD Article 27 ²¹ UN CRC Article 24 World Congress on Linguistic
⁴ UN CRPD Article 13 UN Convention on ⁸ UN CRPD Article 17 ¹¹ UN CRPD Article 20 ¹⁴ UN CRPD Article 24 ¹⁸ UN CRPD Article 28 ²² See the June 9, 1996 Rights, Barcelona, Spain.