

# Sign Language Interpretation – a right for deaf and deaf-blind people

Markku Jokinen

The World Federation of the  
Deaf



# Some background information


- Exact number of Sign languages in the world is not known
- there may be as many Sign languages as there are spoken languages, i.e. 6-7.000
- Sign languages are natural and full-fledged languages independent from spoken languages
- they can be used for all purposes

# Sign languages are minority languages

Arguments:

- Sign languages are complete, independent languages
- They are not related to oral languages in the countries where they exist.
- All languages, written, spoken and signed, are means of communication.
- Sign languages are historical languages.
- Most languages in the world (at least 2/3 of oral languages) do not have a writing system or are not used habitually for writing.

(Skutnabb-Kangas)



Deaf people fulfill the criteria of the national minority according to some researchers

1. they are as a group smaller in number than the rest of the population of a State
2. they have linguistic features different from those of the rest of the population
3. they have, through their organizations, shown the will to safeguard their culture, traditions ... or language.

(Skutnabb-Kangas)

# More facts...

- it is estimated that there are 70 million deaf people in the world
- most of the deaf children are denied to use their Sign languages in education
- linguistic human rights of deaf people are still grossly violated all over the world (linguistic genocide)
- there are still many countries that do not offer professional Sign language interpretation services


# There still has been some positive development recently...

- governments have been urged by the World Federation of the Deaf and its member organisations to consider granting full rights to Sign languages as official languages and to offer real bilingual education and public services to the Deaf
- now there are mentions about Sign Languages in legislations of over 30 countries
  - In constitutions of South Africa, Uganda, Portugal, Finland
  - Sign language interpretation services

- gradually some governments have taken responsibility to offer Sign Language interpretation to Deaf and deaf-blind people
- more and more professional Sign language interpreter training programmes have been established
- Sign Language interpreters' associations have been organised themselves internationally with cooperation of deaf people's organisations
  - EFSLI (European Federation of SL Interpreters), 18 countries
  - WASLI (World Association of SL interpreters)

# Sign language interpretation

- tool for accessibility and equality in many spheres of life
- it is not only deaf and deaf-blind people that use SL interpretation, hearing people need it as well – equal communication for both parties
- before professional SL interpreters family members, teachers for the deaf, priests, friends etc. tried to mediate messages between deaf and hearing people

- 
- Standard Rules stresses the deaf people's right to have Sign language Interpretation Services
  - it is also mentioned in the draft of UN Treaty on Rights for People with Disabilities