

23 September: International Day of Sign Languages



International Day of Sign Languages (IDSL) is celebrated annually across the world on 23 September every year.

According to the World Federation of the Deaf, there are approximately 72 million deaf people worldwide. More than 80% of them live in developing countries. Collectively, they use more than 300 different sign languages.

Sign languages are fully fledged natural languages, structurally distinct from the spoken languages. There is also an international sign language, which is used by deaf people in international meetings and informally when travelling and socializing.

It is considered a pidgin form of sign language that is not as complex as natural sign languages and has a limited lexicon.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognizes and promotes the use of sign languages. It makes clear that sign languages are equal in status to

spoken languages and obligates states parties to facilitate the learning of sign language and promote the linguistic identity of the deaf community.

The UN General Assembly has proclaimed 23 September as the International Day of Sign Languages (IDSL) in order to raise awareness of the importance of sign language in the full realization of the human rights of people who are deaf.

The first International Day of Sign languages was celebrated in 2018 under the theme “With Sign Language, Everyone is Included!”, United Nations reports.

The resolution establishing the day acknowledges that early access to sign language and services in sign language, including quality education available in sign language, is vital to the growth and development of the deaf individual and critical to the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals.

It recognizes the importance of preserving sign languages as part of linguistic and cultural diversity.

It also emphasizes the principle of “nothing about us without us” in terms of working with deaf communities.

The over-arching theme of IDSL 2019 is “Sign Language Rights for All!” IDSL corresponds with International Week of the Deaf, and each day of the week has a sub-theme.

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