

Seeking a New Era in the Deaf Movement

A new era has arrived.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which seeks to fully achieve the various human rights and fundamental freedoms and guarantees the rights and dignity of all persons with disabilities, marks the beginning of a new era. The CRPD has changed the concept of disabilities and individuals with disabilities in line with the change from the previous medical model, in which disabilities were regarded as a personal matter, to the social model.

This social model is the philosophy of the CRPD, which states that it is the responsibility of societies and systems which have been created especially with the consideration of people without disabilities and which create barriers for those with disabilities, to remove such barriers.

This philosophy has been advocated by our predecessors for more than 70 years. Based on this philosophy, we are proud to see the Deaf movement continue to develop by constructing a bond of solidarity between sign language circles, sign language interpreters, and other sign language professionals, as well as people involved in the community and local government.

The Deaf movement, which worked for many years to eliminate discrimination and prejudice against the deaf and hard of hearing and to improve their welfare, is now seeking to remove various barriers and change all areas of society, including welfare, language, education, medical care, information accessibility, sports, etc., as seen in the enactment of the act related to the provision of Telephone Relay Services, the campaign for the enactment of the Japanese Sign Language Act and the Act on Information Accessibility and Communication Security for Persons with Disabilities, and the Japanese bid for the 2025 Summer Deaflympics.

In addition, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action, are a set of goals designed to tackle a wide range of problems in the world and aim for achievement by 2030.

They also call for the elimination of discrimination in such goals as education, growth and employment, reduction of inequality, urban development, and means of implementation and partnership. In conjunction with the SDGs, which are based on the principle of "leaving no one behind," a movement to eliminate discrimination and prejudice requires the solidarity of as many people as possible. This is the "new age" movement.

In order to eliminate social barriers, both society and individuals must change.

The idea of the medical model and eugenic thought still persists in the minds of many people in society, and even within us.

For example, the Japanese terms "健全者" (健全 meaning "normal") and "健聴者" are used to refer to people who can hear, while people who cannot or have difficulty hearing are referred to as "ろう" (meaning "deaf") or "難聴" (meaning "hard of hearing") based on their hearing function from a medical viewpoint and whether or not they can use a spoken language. In addition, although the Japanese word "聴" can be used to mean both hearing and non-hearing, "聴者" (者 meaning "person") is sometimes used to exclusively refer to people who can hear.

Imposing value judgments based on eugenic thought without respecting the identity and will of people who are deaf or hard of hearing takes away our dignity and human rights.

The ideology that the spoken Japanese language is superior has long afflicted the deaf as an oral method of education for the deaf. Distinguishing between Japanese Sign Language and Signed

Japanese from the standpoint of a spoken language, and distinguishing between people who use such sign language expressions, leads to discrimination.

In order to eliminate social barriers, we must advance a movement that eliminates eugenic thought based on the idea of the medical model.

People live by supporting each other, and all people are equal in dignity and rights. The diversity of each person's personality, language, and method of communication should be respected.

If a person identifies himself or herself as "ろう者" (deaf person), "難聴者" (hard of hearing person), or "中途失聴者" (late-deafened person), we should respect that.

Sign language is changing dramatically as we, the deaf, increasingly participate in society, and as expressions in sign language become more and more diverse. This is an inevitable result of any language, including the spoken language of Japanese, and is proof that sign language is alive among us.

In light of the fact that the CRPD calls for the respect of sign language and promotes it as a language on equal footing with spoken languages, we propose that Japan use the term "Japanese Sign Language" (commonly known as "Sign Language") in its laws and official documents.

Let us actively cause social change.

Discrimination is a deep-rooted and difficult problem that manifests itself in various ways in the values and way of thinking of each individual, between persons, and in the social structure of a region or country, due to various reasons, including race, ethnicity, religion, disability, and gender.

As a result, we now face and experience discrimination and social barriers, and must take the lead to actively construct a mutually beneficial society.

The Japanese Federation of the Deaf does hereby declare that it shall take the lead in the realization of a "society where no one is left behind," where each individual's dignity and rights are protected and where deaf people can live with pride using sign language, and thus create a new era with our own hands.

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