



OSS 2007

Operation 'Preserving Deaf People'

Paris - Lyon - Milan March, 2013

'A New Deaf Century on its Way'

INTRODUCING OURSELVES AND GETTING PEOPLE TO ACKNOWLEDGE OUR EXISTENCE

We are planning a symbolic march from Paris to Milan from 18 May to 28 June 2013. This march is a way of **raising awareness about our existence**

We want to show that **we are humans**. That is to say, we are able to think, talk and act like you, people with normal hearing.

We have our language. This language is called the French Sign Language or Deaf Language. We call ourselves Sourds (Deaf) with a capital S (D) because we are proud to belong to the Deaf people community, to actually be Deaf. We are a vast ethno-linguistic minority with 70 million Deaf people around the world.

OUR LANGUAGE: THE SIGN LANGUAGE

Sign Language is essential as it is the only language fully accessible to us. It allows us to develop our full potential and to exercise our free will. In short, Sign Language allows us to enjoy 'normal' lives.

We are human but French politics do not allow us to live as human beings.

Influenced by the almighty medical lobby, **French politics view us as mere hears to be fixed, mere mouths that cannot speak and that need to be repaired**. The recent law for the ultra-early testing of deafness proves that our state does not really care about what we have to say. This has been going on for decades, from the International Congress of Milan in 1880 when Sign Language was prohibited in the education for deaf children.

The French Government, like many others governments in the World, then enforced the resolutions of this congress, thus burying the legacy of the famous Abbé de l'Epée. He had created the first school for Deaf people in the world as early as the 18th century.

His pedagogy founded on the Deaf language had paved the way for the access to **knowledge and citizenship of Deaf people**. This method enabled Deaf people to develop a stunning and refined culture in various fields: the arts, education, philosophy, humour etc.

WHY MARCH TO MILAN?

The congress of Milan has tarnished our collective memory. It has indeed generated barbaric habits in the education of deaf children by prohibiting the use of sign language.

Although our claims seem to be heard by legislators a bit more today, the influence of this congress can still be felt.

However, this small recognition is crushed by the grasp of doctors who want to solve our problems with biotechnology and genetics! But medicine does not provide the expected results. In fact it restrains the development of individuals. This causes a great deal of suffering – a silent suffering because the word of deaf people cannot be uttered.

THE MEANING OF OUR WALK

Our walk to Milan is a call: we want our word, our life to be respected.

We want to stop once and for all the damaging effects of the 1880 congress.

We want to be considered as true human beings and not as hearing impaired people. We want to live rightfully with our language and our culture. We ask for recognition as a specific ethnolinguistic minority.

WHAT WE ARE ASKING

We are asking to the French government :

- **to apologise to Deaf people** for all the harm that successive parliaments and governments have caused since the 1880 congress in Milan.
- **the constitutional adoption of our language, the French Sign Language, as a french national language.**
- The government's promise of a radical reform in institutional practices regarding deaf people (particularly their education). To this end, we require the creation of a **Deaf Affairs Watch**, under the authority of the French National Deaf Federation (with an equal number of, on the one hand independent scientists and intellectuals, and on the other, representatives of the deaf community). Its mission will be to analyse current practices and to define basically and in a sound **(non-medical) way what it is to be a deaf person**. This will allow deaf people to become first-class citizens.