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British Deaf Association voices serious concerns over suitability of the United Arab Emirates to host the next World Federation of the Deaf Congress in 2027 due to country's anti-LGBTQIA+ stance

The British Deaf Association (BDA) would like to express grave concerns about the suitability of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to host the next World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) Congress in 2027.

World Congresses are designed to bring together delegates from member national associations, youth organisations and other participants who seek to partake in global exchange of information and the furtherance of the WFD vision, mission and goals.

Their mission states that they are committed to promoting equality in their work and that all individuals are to be treated similarly regardless of their religion, race, gender, sexual orientation, language, culture or age. Their activities are based on a human rights approach with the goal of equalisation of opportunities and full participation in society for deaf individuals in every country.

Three countries made a bid for the 2027 congress: UAE, Norway and Nigeria. Robert and Abigail will make a detailed video about the voting process and what happened during the process. However, when questioning UAE, it was revealed that due to current legislation, promoting homosexuality in the UAE is illegal, therefore presentations on LGBTQIA+ topics would not be allowed.

Homosexuality is illegal in the UAE and consensual same-sex sexual activity is punishable by imprisonment. Even kissing in public can lead to prosecution. LGBTQIA+ people living in or visiting the UAE are not free to live their lives on an equal basis with heterosexual people.

While we support and applaud the excellent advocacy work that the WFD has carried out on behalf of the international deaf community over the past 70+ years, we believe that allowing this bid to go ahead is a clear contravention of the mission of the WFD: "working to ensure equal rights for 70 million deaf people around the globe".

The WFD Congress is meant to be a safe space where people can learn information, gain tools and strategies, meet new people and learn about their identities and culture; somewhere where 'human rights for all' is celebrated. It is essential to share information and increase knowledge to ensure that people are able to live fulfilled lives.

By permitting the UAE to host the next World Congress without highlighting LGBTQIA+ issues, the WFD could be seen to endorse the UAE's discriminatory and punitive stance on homosexuality, which could make life even harder for LGBTQIA+ people living in or visiting the UAE. It would send a message that the WFD is willing to accept that LGBTQIA+ deaf people are less deserving of equal human rights.

Organisations representing deaf LGBTQIA+ people such as Deaf Rainbow and allies such as sign language interpreters in the UK have written to us to express their shock at the WFD's decision to remain neutral in the face of such overt discrimination.

We call upon the WFD Committee to reconsider the voting decision and to identify a suitable new host nation for the 2027 World Congress whose values and respect for human rights are in line with those held by the WFD.

Rebecca Mansell Chief Executive, British Deaf Association