



World Blind Union Office
1929 Bayview Avenue
Toronto, ON M4G 3E8

Telephone: 1-416-486-9698

Fax: 1-416-486-8107

E-mail: info@wbuoffice.org
www.worldblindunion.org

WBU External Position Statement

Access to Information

Author: Stephen King, RNIB Director Technical and Consumer Services and Kevin Carey, Vice-Chair RNIB
Updated by: Penny Hartin CEO (2014)

Executive Summary

A list of human rights of blind and partially sighted people that should be put into a world summit action plan in relation to the information society: the right to all information in the public domain; to accessible products and services; to be a fair balance between interests of content creators and users; and the right to be heard.

ACCESS TO THE INFORMATION SOCIETY IS A HUMAN RIGHT FOR ALL

Access to the information society is a right for all, including disadvantaged people!

The underlying idea of the World Blind Union, as the organisation representing the 285 million blind and partially sighted people of the world, is that everyone, including the blind and partially sighted, is born equal and entitled to personal dignity and fundamental human rights.

The World Blind Union believe that in the information age access to information is a human right that must be enjoyed by all as a precondition for equal participation in society. This means that socially

and economically disadvantaged people in general should be included, and blind and partially sighted people in particular. The right to access to information is explicitly recognised by the international community in the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)**.

We call upon governments, industry and civil society to secure information rights for all but we will particularly focus on the needs of over 285 million blind and partially sighted people in the world to secure the particular goals which will, nonetheless, be generally applicable to those people and countries who are disadvantaged in the information age.

The human rights of blind and partially sighted people that should be respected and put into an action plan in relation to the information society are:

1. The right to all information which is in the public domain

Blind and Partially sighted people throughout the world have the same right as other citizens to information that is in the public domain.

We therefore call upon governments to:

- take measures to guarantee a universal right of access, underpinned by legislation at the competent level, to all information which is in the public domain whether this is provided free to the public or sold.
- ensure that the way in which the information is designed and delivered does not create barriers to its use. Where information is provided by the public sector there is a special obligation resulting from the concept of equal citizenship to ensure such barriers are eradicated.

2. The right to accessible products and services

Blind and partially sighted citizens throughout the world have the right to a physically accessible information society, products and services.

We therefore call upon governments to:

- secure an understanding of and implementation of the concept of universal design (or design for all) whereby the needs of

information users of all kinds are taken into account during initial content creation.

- support the work of the W3.org/WAI and ensure that its requirements should be incorporated into the design of all digital information.
- ensure that, bearing in mind that the development of technology is likely to continue, compliance with WAI standards is progressive and not static.
- require that multimedia information should be multi-modal and that it should be capable of being rendered by a variety of user interfaces, particularly those which provide a voice-out information stream.
- ensure that commercial suppliers of operating systems and software should design them in such a way that they do not present barriers to accessibility peripheral devices.

3. The right to a fair balance between interests of content creators and of users

The rights of blind and partially sighted users throughout the world and the legitimate rights of content creators must be treated equally.

We therefore call upon governments to:

- require a fair balance between the right to information in the public domain, whether free or at a fair price, in parallel with and not subsidiary to the legitimate rights of content creators to enjoy the fair fruits of their creation.
- prohibit the withholding of rights of access to information simply on the grounds that a person requires an alternative format.
- ensure that all copyright legislation takes account of the special needs of blind and visually impaired people to have access to information in an alternative format of choice at a fair price.

4. The right to be heard

Blind and partially sighted people throughout the world have the right to be involved in decisions relation to the information society that affect them.

We therefore call upon governments to:

- take measures to ensure that, as citizens, blind and visually impaired people are given the right to express their views in respect of the establishment of user requirements for digital information systems, particularly in vital areas of information delivery such as: government information, broadcasting (particularly public broadcasting), health care and information, education and training, public utilities, financial services and major corporations.