

## **Request to submit a statement by accredited non-State actors at sessions of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa**

In accordance with Paragraph 15 of the Annex of the Document AFR/RC71/2, accredited non-State actors wishing to make a statement at sessions of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa must submit a request to the External Relations, Partnerships and Governing Bodies Unit (EPG) of the WHO Regional Office for Africa (at the e-mail address: [GoverningBodiesAfro@who.int](mailto:GoverningBodiesAfro@who.int)) not later than one week before the start date of the session.

The statement should respect the time and word limits set for statements by non-State actors for the relevant session, as specified in the session's Information note disseminated to all participants. The statement should focus on technical issues and should be directly relevant to both the agenda item and to the document prepared for the item. The statement should not raise issues of a political nature that are unrelated to the agenda item and should not contain any inappropriate or offensive reference to Member States. While there should be no reference to any individual Member State or areas of Member States, it is recalled that nomenclature must follow that of the United Nations.

The Chairperson of the Regional Committee decides whether or not to accord the accredited non-State actors the right to make its oral statement during the session in light of its relevance to the discussion, the time constraints or any other reason.

The statement is posted on the website of the WHO Regional Office for Africa for a limited time period as determined by the Secretariat, and will not be retained thereafter.

**Name and acronym of the accredited non-State actor** (in English, French or Portuguese):

**International Association of Communication Sciences and Disorders (IALP)**

**Date and title of the session:** Tuesday, 26 August 2025, 10:30–12:00 Pillar 1: One billion more people benefitting from universal health coverage

Seventy-fifth session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa (RC75), 25 to 29 August 2025 in Lusaka, Zambia\_\_\_\_

**Agenda item (number, title):** Item 9: Regional strategy to strengthen rehabilitation in health systems, 2025–2035

**Form of the statement:**      ☒ Written      ☐ Oral

If in oral form, name and function of the person wishing to read the statement: \_\_\_\_\_

**Statement** (in English, French or Portuguese)

IALP, as a member of the World Rehabilitation Alliance, commends WHO and its partners for their commitment to strengthening rehabilitation globally, and for recognising the importance of inclusive approaches that address communication and swallowing needs.

### **1. Capacity Development for Rehabilitation Professional Training**

Speech-language therapists (SLTs) and audiologists remain among the smallest professional groups in health systems, with acute shortages in many African countries. In some contexts, there is insufficient in-country expertise to deliver comprehensive training. We request updates on progress by WHO and partners in supporting SLT, audiology, and rehabilitation training in low-capacity contexts, including:

- Regionally coordinated training, supervision, and mentorship pipelines.
- National networks for professional recognition and service integration.
- Curricula and resources adapted to African languages, cultures, and local contexts.

We highlight the importance of embedding basic awareness of communication and swallowing disorders in primary health worker training, alongside community outreach and stigma reduction.

Ongoing challenges include access to Continuing Professional Development, scholarships, culturally relevant therapy resources, and locally led research contributing to decolonisation of the professions.

### **2. Recognition of Communication as Fundamental to Human Dignity**

Communication and safe eating and drinking are fundamental human rights, underpinning education, identity, participation, and development. Yet in many African health systems, these needs are undervalued. We urge WHO to promote recognition of communication and swallowing as integral to human dignity, embedding these needs in rehabilitation policy and planning. This aligns with SDGs 3, 4, 8, 10, and 17, (Dada et al., 2023; McLeod & Marshall, 2023).

### **3. Alignment with WHO African Regional Priorities**

These priorities align with AFR/RC75/6 (Rehabilitation) and related WHO AFRO strategies.

Workforce shortages in SLT and audiology cut across health security, child, maternal, and oral health agendas.

We call for WHO leadership in:

- Recognising communication and swallowing as dimensions of human dignity.
- Supporting culturally adapted SLT and audiology training.

**Name:** Brian B. Shulman, PhD, CCC-SLP, ASHA Fellow, FASAHP, FNAP



**Position:** President

**Date:**

14 August 2025