

Input of International Deaf Emergency to the annual thematic study on the rights of persons with disabilities: twenty years of the Convention. Accessible emergency information as unfinished business

31 August 2026

Submitted to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 61/9. International Deaf Emergency consents to publication of this submission.

1. Who we are.

International Deaf Emergency (IDE) is a Deaf-led non-profit organization based in the United States with an international mission. Its president, who signs this submission, is Deaf. IDE builds Deaflare, an emergency-alert application, currently in testing and free to use at launch, that redistributes official government alerts (FEMA IPAWS and National Weather Service feeds) to Deaf, hard-of-hearing, and DeafBlind users through a visual- and haptic-first design: vibration patterns carry the alert for users who cannot see the screen, and the application is designed to work with screen readers and refreshable braille displays. IDE works with the United States FEMA IPAWS program under a signed Memorandum of Agreement (August 2026) covering development and interoperability testing of accessible alerting tooling, and is an active commenter in the United States Federal Communications Commission's open alerting-modernization and Next Generation 9-1-1 accessibility proceedings. IDE authors the Three Senses Alerting Standard, a publicly available, royalty-free specification for delivering equivalent alert meaning across visual, haptic, and audio channels. IDE is an international member of the World Federation of the Deaf, and its president presented on disaster risk reduction for Deaf communities in a webinar hosted by the WFD in 2026.

2. The lesson of twenty years: emergency information is where accessibility law is weakest in practice.

Articles 9, 11 and 21 of the Convention together promise persons with disabilities accessible information "in accessible formats and technologies appropriate to different kinds of disabilities ... without additional cost", including in situations of risk. Twenty years on, the norm is won and the practice is not. In the alerting systems we work with daily, the pattern is consistent:

- **The alert channel assumes one working sense the recipient may not have.** Sirens and radio assume hearing. Television crawls and phone-screen text assume sight. A DeafBlind person, for whom neither channel functions, is structurally invisible to both, and is rarely named in alerting regulation at all.
- **The attention layer is even less accessible than the content layer.** A mobile emergency alert's distinctive tone tells a hearing person, without looking, that this is not an ordinary message. The vibration that accompanies it is identical for every alert and carries no

meaning. The Deaf user must find, unlock and read the device to learn whether the alert is a flood evacuation or a missing-person notice; the DeafBlind user may never perceive it arrived.

- **The end of an emergency is never signalled accessibly.** Hearing communities learn that danger has passed from sirens winding down, radio and conversation. There is, in the systems we know, no standard accessible "all clear", leaving Deaf and DeafBlind people in a sustained state of alarm or, worse, of false confidence.
- **Sign-language users are served last, if at all.** Emergency information in written national language reaches sign-language users in their second language, at crawl speed, in a crisis. Official sign-language renditions of alert content exist (the United States has adopted eighteen American Sign Language wireless-alert video templates, a genuinely good practice) but remain the exception.

3. What twenty years of the Convention has enabled: a good-practice account.

The Convention's framework is why work like ours is possible at all, and states parties' implementing regulation is where it becomes real. Three practices we can attest to from direct experience:

- **Machine-readable public alerting.** Because the United States exposes its national alert aggregator (IPAWS, built on the Common Alerting Protocol) to authorized redistributors, a small Deaf-led non-profit can build the accessible last mile the primary channel lacks, converting the same official alert into vibration patterns, screen-reader-compatible text and braille-display-compatible output. Open, standards-based alert infrastructure is an accessibility measure in itself.
- **Sensory-equivalence design.** The Three Senses Alerting Standard operationalizes articles 9 and 21 as an engineering rule: every alert must carry its meaning through sight, sound, and touch, so that any one working sense is enough. We offer the specification, which is public and free to implement, as one model for the study.
- **Regulatory participation by persons with disabilities.** The Convention's "nothing about us without us" principle works when regulators open their proceedings: IDE's comments in current United States alerting rulemakings put the DeafBlind alerting gap and the meaning-free vibration layer on the regulatory record for the first time.

4. The challenge for the next decade.

Emergency-alerting modernization is under way in many jurisdictions simultaneously: multimedia alerts, satellite direct-to-device delivery, next-generation emergency calling. Each modernization decided without an explicit sensory-equivalence requirement rebuilds today's exclusion into the next thirty years of infrastructure. We respectfully suggest the study record, among lessons learned: that accessibility obligations under articles 9, 11 and 21 attach to the *attention* and *cancellation* layers of public warning, not only to its text; that DeafBlind persons must be named expressly in alerting regulation, because systems designed for "visual OR audio" access exclude them by construction; and that states should treat machine-readable, openly redistributable alert feeds as a Convention implementation measure.

5. Offer.

IDE gladly makes its specification, implementation experience, and Deaf and DeafBlind community networks available to the study.

Emmanuel Jacq

President, International Deaf Emergency

9466 Georgia Avenue, Silver Spring, MD 20910, United States

emmanuel.jacq@ideafe.org

<https://ideafe.org/>