A. Description

In order to achieve the goals of the Incheon Strategy, it is essential that deaf people are able to spend their lives using their own language, which is sign language, in employment, education, to participate in politics, and in all other areas of daily life. Sign languages are not recognized as languages in the Asia-Pacific region. A considerable number of deaf people live in the Asia-Pacific region, but not all of them have the opportunity to learning and using sign language in every stage of their lives. The fact hinders their right to fully develop their cultural and linguistic identity. For those who have sign language, the language they use is not well-recognized either on a legal basis or within general society. As a result, their rights in every aspect of their lives are not fully guaranteed.

The rights of people who use sign language are specified in Articles 21, 24 and 30 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Advancing the legal recognition of sign language is also vital in order to achieve the Goals of the Incheon Strategy.

In the remaining five years, it will be necessary to perceive this theme, which has not been paid sufficient heed, as an important one and for concrete initiatives to be carried out. In order for this to happen, there needs to be a place for high-level decision-makers to come together (a high-level intergovernmental meeting) for discussion toward its recognition. Furthermore, many sign languages are endangered and at risk of falling out of use as its speakers, due to various reasons, shift to speaking another language or there is a change in the demographic situation. Therefore, it is important to raise the awareness of different stakeholders on the gravity of this issue and encourage them to take concrete measures.
More efforts should be placed on mapping linguistic diversity around the world and placing sign languages at an equal level with other human spoken languages. There is an urgent need for development of a new, methodological approach and tools for data collection in order to provide a solid basis for informed decision-making at policy level and the development of appropriate language tools at private and public levels.

**Objectives**
To achieve a society in which sign language is treated as equal to spoken language by promoting the linguistic rights of deaf persons around the world.
To present the legal recognition situation of sign languages in the Asia-Pacific region and the efforts of partner organizations in terms of revitalization of sign languages, as well as examples of forward-thinking local initiatives centered on those being run by each of the three organizations.

**Expected outcomes**
1. The audience can learn about concrete measures and projects being undertaken to achieve the Incheon Strategy goals, to be used as a reference when putting plans into action.
2. Increase opportunities for sign languages to be recognized as languages in the Asia-Pacific region.
3. Learn about new partnership opportunities in the Asia-Pacific region and worldwide.

The event also contributes to the implementation of UNESCO normative instrument “Recommendation concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Access to Cyberspace” (2003).

**B. Key questions**

1. Sign languages are languages and that matter for development.

**C. Tentative programme**

13:15 – Welcome
13:20 – Panel discussion

WFD: Introduction of sign language as the native language of deaf people
UNESCO: Introduction of UNESCO World Atlas of Languages as a tool for the promotion of linguistic rights and data collection on linguistic diversity with special emphasis on Sign Languages.
The Nippon Foundation: Introduction of projects related to sign languages in Japan and overseas.

14:10 – Q&A

**D. Panellists and Moderator**

Mr. Kang Jaehee, Executive Director, Korea Association of the Deaf
Ms. Sonia Pivac, Senior NZSL Advisor, Office for Disability Issues (to be confirmed)

Mr. Fujisaburo Ishino, President, Japanese Federation of the Deaf

Mr. Mitsuji Hisamatsu, General Secretary, Japanese Federation of the Deaf

Ms Irmgarda Kasinskaite-Buddeberg, Knowledge Societies Division, Communication and Information Sector, UNESCO

Professor Gladys Tang, Director, Centre for Sign Linguistics and Deaf Studies, Chinese University of Hong Kong

Mr. Yasunobu Ishii, Senior Project Manager The Nippon Foundation

**Moderated by:** Mr. Yasunori Shimamoto, Regional Director, World Federation of the Deaf Regional Director for Asia

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**E. Contact Person**

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