

“WBU calls for increased access to braille on World Braille Day”

Each year on January 4, the global blindness community comes together to celebrate Louis Braille, the inventor of the braille writing system, along with the system he invented, which would eventually go on to change the lives of blind people throughout the world.

This simple system of combining six raised dots into different patterns enable braille users to read not only books, but music notation and mathematical formulas as well. Its flexibility has also allowed it to be adapted into many languages used around the world. “I always look forward to beginning each year with a celebration of braille and all that it has contributed to the lives of blind people”, said **Martine Abel-Williamson**, President of the World Blind Union. “Not only is this an opportunity to celebrate, though, World Braille Day is also, a day to take stock of what further actions need to be taken to improve access to braille”, added Abel-Williamson.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) is the key guiding document for the global disability movement. The CRPD outlines obligations for those countries who have ratified the convention, including obligations regarding access to braille. Article 21 of the CRPD requires member states to ensure that information intended for the general public is in accessible formats such as braille, and article 24 requires that in the education system, students who are blind receive their education in the modes that are most appropriate to their needs, such as braille from educators who are fluent in braille. “Despite obligations arising from international and national law, we know many blind people lack access to braille itself, to appropriate training in braille, and to technologies that facilitate the use of braille”, said Marc Workman, WBU CEO. We take this opportunity on January 4 to call on governments around the world to commit to improving access to braille for their blind citizens both within the education system and beyond, added Workman.

One concrete step countries can take to improve access to braille is to ratify and fully implement the Marrakesh Treaty. Among other things, this Treaty facilitates the cross-border sharing of braille materials, which means blind people in countries with limited access to braille can gain the ability to read braille materials produced in countries with larger braille libraries”, said Kim Charlson, newly appointed chair of the WBU World Braille Council and Executive Director of the Braille & Talking Book Library at the world-renowned Perkins School for the Blind. Although many countries have ratified the Marrakesh Treaty, full legal and technical implementation has not occurred in far too many countries throughout the world, leaving the tremendous promise of this Treaty largely unfulfilled.

While World Braille Day will always be a day for celebration, it must also remain a call to action until blind people across the world have full access to this life-changing tool. This January 4, we ask you to join us in both celebrating braille and calling on governments to ensure access to braille is a priority around the world.

Total Inclusion Limited/GTE endorses the statement of the World Blind Union above to mark International Braille Day. We join with our friends all over the world in celebrating today, but we also call on our government to ensure access to braille is a priority.

Nigeria is one of the countries which has ratified the Marrakesh treaty, but has not enacted the technical and other requirements. This is contained in the Copyright Bill which has yet to receive presidential assent. We therefore call on President Buhari to put his assent to the bill as a matter of priority. We thank the president for assenting to the Discrimination Against Disabled Persons (Prohibition) act. We look at this as a first step towards equal access to education for all blind people and persons with disabilities.

Total Inclusion is a new company, set up to initiate and develop programmes to give equal access to all aspects of society, regardless of disability. We are currently working on initiatives to improve financial inclusion and access to mathematics education for the blind and other persons with disabilities. Braille is an important element of both programmes. so, we are grateful to Louis Braille for his invention and thrilled to be a part of celebrating such a transformative idea.

Like Total Inclusion, Louis Braille's invention started very small, but its value was so recognized that it has achieved worldwide acceptance. We hope that you will join us to ensure that blind people are totally included in all aspects of daily life. This is one of the legacies of Louis Braille. It will also bring the skills and patriotism of a hitherto excluded segment of our population into the limelight for a greater country. We look forward to this with all our hearts. Please look out for opportunities to join us in ensuring that all are included.