



**women, youth &  
persons with disabilities**

Department:  
Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



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## **Affirmation of Deaf People's Human Rights Webinar**

**By**

**Deputy Minister in the Department of Women Youth and Persons  
with Disabilities: in the Presidency Prof Hlengiwe Mkhize**

**Date: 30 September 2020**

Director General :Advocate Mikateko Maluleke

National Director: DeafSA: Mr Bruno Druchen

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Programme Director: Ms Ayesha Ramjugenath

Ladies and gentlemen

## **Setting the Scene – Role of Ministry in the Presidency: Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities**

Championing and advancing the rights of Deaf people is a core aspect of the mandate of the Ministry in the Presidency: Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities.

But our role goes beyond advocating for change.

President Ramaphosa made it clear when he established this Ministry in 2019, that he expects the Ministry to also influence government's delivery machinery to ensure that we change the lives of women, youth and persons with disabilities in a meaningful way. This therefore requires that our monitoring and evaluation system is able to demonstrate impact.

The inclusion of disability in the 2019-2024 Medium Term Strategic Framework, which constitutes the National Programme of Action for the current Administration, is a turning point in particular for persons with disabilities, as it is the first time that your interests and aspirations are reflected in the Programme of Action at such a strategic level.

It however carries with it a tremendous responsibility to champion and monitor effective implementation, a responsibility which the Minister and I do not take lightly.

It also demands that we re-energise the partnership between government and organs of civil society to drive our transformation and disability inclusion agenda with more urgency and impact.

Partnering with DeafSA in hosting this Webinar to mark the end of National Month of Deaf People, is therefore not a nice to have, but a must to have.

But it also requires of us to use this opportunity today to engage one another in how we can deepen the partnership between Deaf and Deafblind representative organisations and government, to ensure that we deliver South African Sign Language faster, better and more cost effective to all South Africans.

### **Setting the Scene – National Month of Deaf People 2020**

Firstly, let me express my appreciation to DeafSA for the leadership you provided during National Month of Deaf People 2020. It must have been one of the most visible sustained campaigns on our 2020 Annual Calendar, involving and reaching Deaf constituencies in the cities, townships and villages across all nine provinces.

You did not allow the COVID-19 pandemic to hold you back, but used it as an opportunity to go virtual, almost daily, which also meant you were able to reach both Deaf and hearing South Africans with your slogan for the month - **“Reaffirming Deaf People’s Human Rights”**.

I was particularly inspired by the manner in which you involved people who impact on the promotion of the rights of Deaf people - from academics, to Deaf activists, to hearing families of Deaf children, schools etc. Also, a few of your webinars involved providing a platform for

government officials to account on what they are doing – or not doing – in promoting South African Sign Language.

So to the leadership of DeafSA, WELL DONE!

And to the leadership and membership of other Deaf formations, thank you for uniting as a constituency, putting your differences aside, and supporting and contributing to the Month's calendar of events and activism.

Working together is necessary if we want to see change in this generation – **we must be the change we want to see!**

And yes, we heard you loud and clear on International Day of Sign Languages that South African Sign Language is for everyone, not just for Deaf people!

### **Launching the South African Sign Language Charter**

The Parliamentary Constitutional Review Committee is in the process to amend section 30 of the Constitution and the Use of Official Languages Act 12 of 2012 to be consistent with section 75/76 of the constitution. Government will therefore provide for special measures for the deaf community according to section 28 of the promotion of equality and the prevention of unfair discrimination act 52 of 2002, to achieve the above mentioned purpose. I am therefore confident that this motion and amendment will attract a favourable vote from the majority of the members of parliament.

The launch of the South African Sign Language Charter on September 4, 2020 signalled a new era for the rights of Deaf South Africans.

I know that when our children and grandchildren look back many years from now, all South Africans will mark this day as a turning point for the language and cultural rights of not only Deaf South Africans, but all South Africans, finding expression in our national motto, ***Unity in Diversity***.

**Programme Director,**

Allow me to pause briefly on the nine pledges contained in the Charter, and how I see the role of our Ministry in advancing these pledges for impact.

**Pledge 1: There must be a better understanding, nationally, of South African Sign Language as a language in its own right**

For the Ministry, this is a given, and I do believe that the battle has been won to a large extent, except for a few nay-sayers who do not enjoy much credibility.

But again, I must credit the Deaf community for turning adversity into opportunity to advance the status of South African Sign Language as an equal language in its own right, first during Madiba's memorial service and the fake interpreter saga, and more recently, ensuring that the COVID-19 regulations demand South African Sign Language interpretation for all COVID related television coverage.

**Pledge 2: There should be self-determination by Deaf people**

Our Ministry has embedded the right of persons with disabilities to represent themselves through their representative organisations in our standard operating procedures, and we continue to encourage and advocate for all organs of the state to follow suit.

I would however also like to challenge Deaf organisations to ensure that it is not only middle age men who are able to enjoy the right to self-determination, but that you will do more to ensure that you build vibrant women and youth formations within your organisations.

**Pledge 3: There should be a promotion of learning and high-quality teaching of South African Sign Language**

This pledge demands alignment and synergy in both policy and practice between different organs of the state to ensure that Deaf people have access to development and learning from cradle to grave through quality learning and teaching of South African Sign Language.

I am committing the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities to work in partnership with Pan South African Language Board and Deaf organisations in achieving this, and that this will become a reality for Deaf children, young people and older persons in this generation.

**Pledge 4: Multilingual Deaf Education for Deaf children should be encouraged and promoted**

The introduction of South African Sign Language as a first language option as well as a medium for teaching and learning was an important milestone for South African Deaf children.

We are aware that there are challenges with equitable implementation across all Schools for the Deaf, but our Ministry will continue to work with Deaf organisations, Pan South African Language Board and the Ministry of Basic Education to accelerate

and improve in particular the development of quality learning materials in South African Sign Language for Deaf learners.

**Pledge 5: There should be guaranteed accessibility to services and information through South African Sign Language**

Our Ministry will advance implementation of this pledge by working with Deaf organisations and Pan South African Language Board in developing a short set of indicators to monitor implementation of the key interventions advanced by the Charter to enable us to report on an annual basis to Cabinet, Parliament, and periodically to the international treaty bodies on progress being made.

The department will have to do a cost benefit analysis of employing a qualified hearing interpreter or a Deaf South African Sign Language interpreter in the Department, versus procuring South African Sign Language services through a multi-year bid. This will enable us not only to increase access to information of public opportunities and services to Deaf citizens and residents who approach the Department, but also to increase visibility of South African Sign Language by having interpreters on hand whenever we engage the public through the media or at events.

**Pledge 6: Persons working directly with Deaf people should meet the minimum standards of competency in South African Sign Language**

The DWYPD as the disability focal point in government, would explore opportunities for as many officials as possible to learn South African Sign Language

**Pledge 7: Local Deaf communities should be consulted on a regular basis on all matters affecting their lives**

The provisions of this Pledge are already government policy, but lack urgency in implementation.

The DWYPD will therefore engage with the GCIS to ensure that we accelerate Deaf participation during all public participation programmes, across all spheres of government by embedding qualified South African Sign Language interpreter's in line with our public participation standard operating procedures.

**Pledge 8: Professional South African Sign Language interpreting and translating services should be readily available**

Whilst I am aware that the Disability Rights Branch of the DWYPD has institutionalised the standards for the use of South African Sign Language interpreters in all our departmental events, I am cognisant that this is not happening across government.



Our Department will work with Deaf organisations, Pan South African Language Board and the Department of Public Service and Administration in developing a Standard Operating Procedure for the use of professional South African Sign Language interpreting and translating services in the public sector.

### **Pledge 9: The South African Police Service and the Director of Public Prosecutions should respect Deaf people**

As a Ministry, we will ensure that the provisions in this pledge are included in the monitoring system I alluded to under Pledge 5.

**And finally,**

I would like to assure the Deaf community in South Africa that we will continue to advocate for the legal recognition of South African Sign Language as an official language through an amendment to the Constitution, through continuous follow up with our Parliamentary systems.

### **Conclusion**

Programme Director

The struggle for the realisation of the right to equality and dignity for Deaf people in South Africa is not a Deaf struggle.

We are in this together.

In the words of Fannie Lou Hamer, an African-American woman,  
**“Nobody’s Free Until everybody’s Free”.**

As your champion, I will speak up, I will speak out, and I will ensure that action is taken when the political, economic, language and cultural rights of Deaf persons are violated.

It starts with us.

Together we can.

Together we will.

Together we must.

I Thank You!!