

MALAWI HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION



STATEMENT ON THE COMMEMORATION OF INTERNATIONAL WEEK OF THE DEAF AND INTERNATIONAL DAY OF SIGN LANGUAGE

Every year, the period from 19-25th September is commemorated as International Week of the Deaf (IWD) culminating in the International Day on Sign Language (IDSL) on 23rd September. The global theme for this year's IWD is ***“Building Inclusive Communities for All”*** while the IDSL will globally be commemorated under the theme ***“Sign Languages Unite Us”***. Malawi joins the rest of the world in commemorating these important two events.

As we commemorate this year's IWD and IDSL, the Commission reflects on the gaps that still exist in the promotion and protection of the rights of the deaf. Deaf people are among the least served, marginalized, and discriminated against population among all forms of disability in our society despite progressive legislation and policies in place.

This year's commemoration of IWD should serve as a reminder that we must ensure that deaf people enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms as provided in the Constitution and other international legal instruments. The Commission welcomes this year's theme, ***“Building Inclusive Communities for All”*** which fits well into our situation as a nation.

Building an inclusive society begins with more awareness of the rights of deaf people. Create more equal opportunities for them by removing the barriers they experience in society, and investing a lot in programmes and interventions that aim at empowering them to demand and enjoy their rights. The Government, development partners and concerned stakeholders should commit more resources to deaf-related programming.

The Commission recognizes the critical role sign language plays in deaf people's enjoyment of their human rights. Specifically, the right to access information; the right to education; freedom of expression, and association among others. Sign

language is the only medium of communication among deaf people and without it, they will remain disconnected from the wider society.

The Commission, therefore, calls on the nation to seriously reflect on the 2022 IDSL theme which is, “**Sign Language Unit Us**”. The theme speaks volumes about the importance of sign language in bringing unity and conversation between the Deaf community and the wider society. While this year’s IWD calls us to build inclusive societies, the Commission believes that this noble call cannot happen if we neglect sign language.

The Commission would like to commend the government and the Malawi National Association for the Deaf (MANAD) for developing the first-ever Sign Language dictionary in the country. The Commission believes that the development of this blueprint is a step towards building an inclusive society that we inspire. However, the Commission laments the non-availability of Sign Language interpretations in most Television Stations. In this regard, the Commission calls upon the Malawi Communication Regulatory Authority (MACRA) to make Sign Language a pre-requisite for the issuance of TV Licences in Malawi.

The Commission is also aware of various promises that the Government made to address the dire shortage of Sign Language Interpreters in Malawi. The most outstanding is the commitment to finance the training of Sign Language Interpreters which has not been fulfilled. The Commission would like to call upon Government to fulfil its promises.

The Commission remains committed and determined to continue spearheading and advocating for the rights of all groups of people. We, therefore, call on various stakeholders within the human rights sector including the media to continue championing human rights for vulnerable groups and exposing human rights violations occurring behind the scene.

Scader Louis



CHAIRPERSON

This day, 20th September 2022