



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Kampala

16th September 2019

Uganda to commemorate 14th International Deaf Awareness Week (IDAW) 23rd to 27th September 2019.

Uganda is set to join the rest of the World to commemorate the International Deaf Awareness Week (IDAW) from Monday 23rd to Friday 27th September 2019. For Uganda, this year's event will be held in Kisoro Municipality under the theme **“The power of Sign language”**.

The International Deaf Awareness Week (IDAW) is observed annually during the fourth week of September worldwide. The purpose of International Deaf Awareness week is to draw the attention of politicians, authorities and the general public to the achievements and concerns of the Deaf persons and their organizations. The goal is to create awareness about deafness and deaf persons with an aim of promoting inclusion of Deaf persons in their communities hence access to services provided there in. This week also increases solidarity among Deaf persons and stimulates efforts to promote their rights

In November 2017, the 72nd UN General Assembly proclaimed **23rd September** as the International Day of Sign Languages in order to raise awareness of the importance of sign language in the full realization of the human rights of people who are deaf. This day follows within the IDAW week. In Uganda, the event is

being organised by Uganda National Association of the Deaf (UNAD) in conjunction with Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD).

Uganda National Association of the Deaf (UNAD) is a national NGO bringing together all categories of Deaf persons in Uganda. UNAD envisions ‘dignity for every Deaf person in Uganda’. Formed in 1973 by Deaf persons themselves, UNAD brings together an estimated 1,083,649 Deaf persons in Uganda (UBOS 2014).

This year’s theme re-echoes government’s recognition of diversity and its efforts to promote the rights of PWDs. It calls for equality for Deaf persons. Equality for Deaf Persons recognizes contributions by Deaf persons to Uganda’s prosperity, human rights and preparation of Deaf communities for future challenges. The Power of Sign language also celebrates the linguistic, artistic, social, political and cultural contributions and accomplishments of Deaf persons.

This year’s theme is in line with the central theme of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – ‘Leave no one behind’. Without Sign language being included in every programme activity, Deaf persons are automatically left out /excluded and hence left behind.

The theme calls upon the Government to implement the constitutional provision as enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda-1995. Article XXIV (C) “The Government shall provide and promote Sign language for the Deaf people.”

With sign language few Deaf people have been able to attend school, participate in politics, access information on televisions where sign language interpretation is provided, get employment opportunities etc

However, despite the progress registered by this country in such sectors like education, health, economic empowerment etc, the majority of Deaf persons are not either aware of the programmes at all because the medium of disseminating that information omitted sign language hence it excluded the deaf persons. Where Deaf persons are aware, interaction with the service provider poses another challenge as no Sign language interpreter is provided unless you meet your own cost to hire one.

Without a language, one cannot interact with others, you are made powerless. “Language is the armoury of the human mind, and at once contains the trophies of its past and the weapons of its future conquests”. However due to limited efforts to promote Sign language, thousands of Deaf persons are not knowledgeable in Uganda Sign Language!!

Deaf people are appealing to the Government to design and operationalize a Sign language curriculum where SL should be taught as a subject. Include sign language interpreters in the public service structures, including a course in Uganda Sign language in all medical, police, teacher and law training schools.

Without the government prioritising Sign language for the Deaf persons in Uganda, “Islands of poverty, ignorance among the vulnerable approximately 3% of the population will continue to exist in the sea of wealth, literacy”

Activities geared at awareness raising have been planned. These include debate between Deaf and hearing schools, football matches between Deaf and hearing teams from both schools and adult Deaf teams. There will be sign language sensitisation in school in the municipality, painting of Zebra crossing, public dialogues of inclusive education, sexual and reproductive health and access to justice. The dialogues will be facilitated by relevant officials from Ministry of Education, Reproductive Health Uganda, Uganda Police Force and Kisoro District Local Government.

These activities call for participation and involvements of various stakeholders including families, peers, government bodies, professional Sign Language Interpreters, and Organizations of Persons With Disabilities.

The week-long event will climax on Friday with the Speaker of Parliament Rt. Hon Rebecca Kadaga gracing the occasion as the chief guest.

Thank you.

For more information, please contact

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