



PRESS STATEMENT

BY

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MINISTER OF STATE FOR DISABILITY AFFAIRS

ON THE

PREPARATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEAF

AWARENESS WEEK

TO TAKE PLACE FROM 19TH TO 23RD SEPTEMBER 2022

VENUE: MEDIA CENTRE, KAMPALA

Fellow Countrymen and women, Members of the Media Fraternity present

I want to welcome you to this Press Conference

Uganda will join the rest of the World to commemorate the International Deaf Awareness Week, from 19th to 23rd September 2022. The climax of this week-long commemoration will be a National event to take place on 23rd September 2022 at **Iganga Municipal Council Primary School**, in Iganga Municipality presided over by the Rt. Hon. Prime Minister of the Republic of Uganda.

The UN theme for the International Deaf Awareness Week 2022 is “Building Inclusive communities for All”. This theme has however been domesticated (adapted locally) to ***“Building Inclusive Communities for All: Uganda Sign Language Unites Us”***.

The adapted theme aligns with the Ugandan culture and global advocacy efforts, to raise awareness about the needs of the deaf community at different levels. It is about coming together, becoming united, and demonstrating the unity to the rest of the world, through sign language.

National Organising Committee meetings have been taking place at the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development and more meetings have been scheduled to put in place planned activities.

PLANNED ACTIVITIES

Pre-event activities have been arranged and these include:

- (i) Uganda Sign Language training and awareness to service providers including Judicial Officers, health workers, teachers and community leaders, among others.
- (ii) Cultural gala in Uganda Sign Language (Music Drama and Dance and Comedy) airing out issues of concern to deaf people.
- (iii) Public lecture by eminent speakers; this will be a panel discussion on inclusion of deaf people in poverty reduction programs with specific emphasis on the Parish Development Model.
- (iv) Debate in Schools involving both deaf and hearing students.
- (v) Community Health Camp especially themed around sexual and reproductive health, blood donation and screening.
- (vi) Radio talk shows on inclusive development.

The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) gazetted the third week of September each year as the International Week of Deaf People (IWDP) and has been celebrated since 1958, when it was launched in Rome – Italy. Additionally, the United Nations (UN) declared the International Day of Sign Languages which falls in the same week.

Government of Uganda through My Ministry, in partnership with Uganda National Association of the Deaf (UNAD) has been commemorating this event for the last 16 years. The commemoration brings together Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies, community members, professionals, institutions, development partners and the general public to participate in the engagement on hearing loss, deaf people and their social- economic wellbeing.

My Ministry recognises the current National Special Grant for Persons with Disabilities and the Parish Development Model (PDM) 10% allocation for persons with disabilities including deaf persons, among other government programs for giving deaf persons' opportunity to participate in the development of the country.

The Week draws attention to the accomplishments of people who are deaf, raises awareness of their unique needs and also

promotes their human rights. During this Week, state and non-state actors publicize many activities and informational campaigns to educate people about deafness and hearing loss. The week-long annual commemoration, is not only a chance to raise awareness of the challenges of living with hearing loss, but is also an opportunity to show that one can live a better life with hearing loss.

Sign language is the critical prerequisite to reach the full participation of deaf people in their communities and ensure the realization of their human rights. It calls upon relevant stakeholders to provide support and disseminate information on early acquisition to Uganda Sign Language and provide inclusive quality bilingual education. In addition, it calls for support to professional and trained Uganda Sign Language Interpreters to enable the participation of deaf people in society.

My Ministry is in agreement with other stake holders for Recognition of Uganda Sign Language as an official language in the Constitution of Uganda. This is important for the inclusion of deaf people in implementing Uganda's Vision 2040 and achievement of the 2030 SDG Agenda of leaving no one behind.

This theme on “Building Inclusive Communities for All: Uganda Sign Language Unites Us”, therefore, highlights the efforts Government needs to undertake to provide inclusion of the deaf community especially through sign language to increase their access to government programs and information. It will also motivate other stakeholders and development partners to support the deaf community to utilize available programs in Uganda for inclusive development.

The theme reminds us on the need to fill the gaps in deployment of teachers in inclusive education model and to increase on the number of special schools for the deaf. Some regions are not covered with the special schools yet inclusive education is still challenged with resourcing, hence excluding most of the deaf children in untargeted regions.

According to the 2014 Uganda National Housing and Population statistics, there are over 1,083,649 Deaf people in Uganda (UBOS 2014). This has since increased to 1,290,000 of the current Uganda’s population.

Government is committed and prepared to address the concerns and needs that come with deafness to ensure inclusion of deaf people socio-economic development processes. Inclusion of the

deaf community in the country's development agenda is key in fulfilling Uganda's Vision 2040 and achievement of the 2030 Agenda of leaving no one behind.

RESULTS/ OUTCOMES FROM THE PREVIOUS EVENT (2021)

During last year's commemoration, key achievements were highlighted and challenges identified in relation to upholding the rights and welfare of Deaf Persons. The outcomes from the previous commemoration include;

1. Increase in the number of deaf people benefiting from the special grant for people with disability. Deaf people are among the most vulnerable categories of disability due to their inability to access information. Through affirmative action, we are ensuring that many more benefit from this grant.
2. The Ministry of Education and Sports has embarked on the process of translating learning materials into Uganda Sign Language. This was made possible with support from UNICEF. Ministry of Education and Sports need to prioritize translation of more educational materials for meaningful inclusion of deaf children in schools across the country.
3. Since the last celebrations in 2021, Government has made a commitment to recruit sign language interpreters. This commitment was made during the Global Disability Summit.

The National Council for Persons with Disabilities together with Kyambogo University is working to strengthen professionalism in the sign language interpretation profession.

4. After the 2021 Deaf Awareness Week, my Ministry launched a National Disability Coordination Committee which includes representatives from the deaf community with sign language interpreters, as an affirmative action for this category of disability.
5. Similarly, after last year's event, my Ministry has made several engagements with key Ministries such as Ministry responsible for ICT and Media houses and Ministry of Public Service, among others, to raise awareness on the urgency to adapt sign language as a critical medium of communication in routine operations. Parliament has also raised the matter to my Ministry, on several occasions challenging Government, on inadequate inclusion mechanisms for the deaf community.

I thank you all for listening to me

FOR GOD AND MY COUNTRY