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“REAFFIRMING DEAF PEOPLE’S HUMAN’S RIGHTS”

By: Edith Mogapi

The world is increasingly becoming sympathetic and aware of the struggles faced by the Deaf people, and many countries have developed measures aimed at creating an enabling environment in which Deaf people can freely participate without restrictions.

North West Department of Arts, Culture, Sports and Recreation (ACSR) celebrated Deaf Awareness month by visiting North West secondary school for the deaf on Wednesday 23rd September.

The month of September has been declared by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as Deaf Awareness month to promote Deaf culture, Heritage and the promotion of various regional and national dialects such as South African Sign Language (SASL).

The 23rd of September was also adopted by the United Nations General Assembly as International day of Sign Languages. This year’s theme “**Reaffirming Deaf people`s human rights**” is in line with the SASL Charter which was launched on the 4th of September 2020. The charter aims to enable the Deaf Community to have equitable access to information, services and to participate in all spheres of life.

Through such conferences, the aim is to foster public awareness regarding SASL and issues affecting the Deaf community in general. The main objectives being- to ensure that Sign language is developed and promoted by raising awareness in the form of campaigns, seminars and conferences; to educate communities about Deaf culture and history in order to change attitudes; and to ensure that the Deaf community is included by providing interpreting service in all government events and provision of services.

NEEMA foundation for the Deaf CEO Mme Judith Madi who was part of the conference as one of the speakers for the day said “we are pleading with the hearing community to take some time and learn sign language as much as any other South African language that is official. We want our language to be regarded as an official language so that we also feel included as part of a caring nation”.

The North West Government fully supports the cause through its programmes. A number of programmes aimed at empowering Deaf community and ensuring access to services have been developed and rolled out such as Crafters workshop, visual Arts workshop, Inclusive Education which saw 20 learners complete their NQF level 5 in March this year with some now employed by Kutlwanong School for the Deaf and others absorbed into the EPWP programme.



A number of programmes are also in the pipeline and these include, but not limited to Terminology workshops and Deaf Production.

Some of the North West Government entities are now accessible to Deaf people because of awareness and training efforts from government.

“Although it is the responsibility of every one to ensure that they are accommodated in all spheres of life, North West governments strives to put measures in places to support Deaf people and we urge everyone to be sympathetic to the needs of this important community. It cannot be left to Deaf people themselves to fight for their rights on their own, they need our support at all times. We can all start by participating in the global challenge issued by world federation of the Deaf and learn South African Sign Language”, concluded Ms Madi.

“On behalf of North West Government, the Department of Arts, Culture Sports and Recreation assures the Deaf community in North West that we will continue to make an effort in ensuring that the rights of Deaf people are respected and protected”, said Mme Ingrid Duiker-Language services manager in the Department

She continued, “We will ensure that we continue to support and make Government services in the Province accessible to the Deaf community. We reaffirm that Deaf people have equal rights just like everyone and that includes the rights to life, the right to participate in society, the right to work, the right to education, and the right to belong to a cultural minority and use of SASL and the right to develop self-determination”.

Celebration of this event supports all efforts made by government to promote the dissemination of our Mother Languages which will serve not only to encourage linguistic diversity and multilingual education but also to develop fuller awareness of linguistic and cultural traditions throughout the world and to inspire solidarity based on understanding, tolerance and dialogue.

