



**women, youth &
persons with disabilities**

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



Private Bag X931, Pretoria, 0001, 36 Hamilton Street, Arcadia, Pretoria

Tel: 012 359 0071/2, Fax: 012 323 5954

Speech at South African Sign Language Charter

By

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

Date: 04 September 2020

Honorable Minister: Mr Nathi Mthethwa (in his absentia)

PanSALB Board Chairperson: Dr David Maahlamela

SASL NLB Chairperson: Mr Bheki Guliwe

Acting EHL: Ms Nikiwe Matebula

National Director of DEAFSA: Mr Bruno Druchen

CEO of SANDA : Mr Jabulane Blose

PanSALB Board Member :Mr Cinga Qgabu

Representative of the PAN South African Language Board

Representative of the Deaf Associations

South African Sign language experts

Government Communication Information System (GCIS)

Members of the media

Ladies and Gentlemen

Programme Director: Mr Tshepo Maseko

We are gathered here to launch the charter of the South African Sign Language, which provides for the recognition of the sign language for Deaf South Africans and the public in general. The Association of Deaf people have lodged a long hard struggle to get South African Sign Language to be recognised by the Government in all its sectors and society at large.

In the first instance sign language is a mode of communication and a language like any other spoken or written language. The White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, also emphasises the positioning of South African Sign Language as a method of communication, for promotion on access to information by the Deaf community.

It is therefore important to consider the legislating and regulating South African Sign Language by declaring it the 12th official language for the country. This will be available on request or on-demand to assist the deaf community to access services, information, public institutions and education with ease and the language that they understand.

In terms of section 30 of the Constitution provides that “everyone has the right to use the language and to participate in the cultural life of their choice, but no one exercising these rights may do so in a manner inconsistent with any provision of the Bill of Rights”.

It is my pleasure to announce that South African Sign Language recognition as the 12th official language is in the pipeline. It is being considered by Parliamentary Constitutional Review Committee, to amend Section 30 of the Constitution and the National Official Languages, to be consistent with the requirement of the Parliament, to pass the amendment into law through a vote of the National Council of Provinces and National Assembly, which are both houses of parliament, I am therefore confident that this motion and amendment will attract a favourable vote from the majority of the members of parliament.

While we are launching this Charter, September Month is recognised as Deaf Awareness Month throughout the world. The Charter, therefore, have to consider the following aspects for instance:

Recognition of South African Sign Language as the 12th official language, Deaf awareness activities for the South African Public, Promotion of Deaf culture, access to all services and facilities by deaf persons, the inclusion of South African Sign Language into the curriculum of all educational level and professionalization of South African Sign Language.

Close captioning, sub-titles and South African Sign Language go hand in hand and the same applies to leap reading, relay interpretation and non-academic hand signs that are most prevalent in the township and rural areas.

These services are necessary to teach young deaf children and to promote literacy of South African Sign Language to The Deaf community in South Africa. My department is currently negotiating with the SABC to ensure that South African Sign Language is provided for in television.

The department is also providing sign language interpreter services to the deaf community on television during the briefings by the Ministers and the President on Covid-19 activities and programmes.

By all means, we have to take both steps to provide the availability of qualified South Africa Sign Language interpreters where the need arises and professionals in the public service such as police, magistrates, teachers, doctors, nurses and frontline staff have to learn basic sign language and perhaps advanced South African Sign Language at a later stage.

I want to emphasise that South African Sign Language is a right and not a privilege and is a language of the first line of communication for deaf persons. The strengthening of inter-sectoral collaboration between the government and the Deaf community will make South Africa one of the countries that provide for Deaf persons communication mode in their own local language.

I THANK YOU