



STATEMENT BY THE MALAWI COUNCIL FOR DISABILITY AFFAIRS (MACODA) ON THE 2025 INTERNATIONAL DAY OF SIGN LANGUAGES COMMEMORATION

The Malawi Council for Disability Affairs (MACODA), joins the global human rights community in commemorating the International Day of Sign Languages. Observed annually on September 23rd, this day serves as a crucial reminder of the importance of sign languages and their integral role in realising the full spectrum of human rights for deaf persons. This year's theme, “No Human Rights Without Sign Language Rights,” powerfully underscores an important fact: access to and use of sign language is not merely a communication preference but a prerequisite for the enjoyment of all fundamental human rights and freedoms. For deaf persons, sign language is their primary language which is essential for their wellbeing and development, education, justice, employment opportunities and active participation in social, cultural, economic and political life.

Sign language is the pillar for social justice for deaf persons as it is pivotal for defining their essence, dignity and personhood as human beings. Without sign language there is a huge threat to deaf rights and the preservation and promotion of the Deaf culture. In fact, sign language promotion entails the elevation of Deaf culture as this is an integral tool for the advancement of the rights of deaf persons in order to enhance human diversity.

During this commemoration, MACODA wishes to remind everyone that sign language is a national language whose usage is a manifestation of the enjoyment of human rights just like any other language. It is for this reason that MACODA is impressed by the legislative and constitutional strides Malawi is making to ensure the rights of deaf citizens are upheld. The Constitution of Malawi provides a foundational commitment to equal access to information for all citizens under Section 37, a principle that extends to communication access for persons with disabilities. Furthermore, Section 30 of the landmark Persons with Disabilities Act, 2024 specifically mandates and provides for the provision of sign language interpretation, ensuring that

vital information and services are accessible. Complementing these national efforts, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), particularly Article 21 on freedom of expression, opinion, and access to information, explicitly recognises and encourages the use of sign languages in all spheres of life. Similarly, Article 2 of the UNCRPD recognises sign language as equal to spoken language. The African Disability Protocol, in Articles 15 and 24, also accentuates the indispensability and centrality of sign language as a vehicle of facilitating the enjoyment of all fundamental rights for deaf people through safeguarding their accessibility to all services and to access to information in all spheres of public life.

The new National Disability Policy (2025) further emphasises the significance of sign language as an assistive technology and a critical means to realise the right to accessibility for deaf persons. These frameworks pave the way for the recognition of sign language not just as a communication tool but as a distinct and important spoken language, deserving of respect, preservation and promotion.

As MACODA, we are encouraged by the tangible progress witnessed in Malawi regarding sign language accessibility. For instance, in the media, the state broadcaster, the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation, has taken a commendable step by incorporating sign language interpretation into its news bulletins, reaching a wider deaf audience. In many other media institutions, sign language interpreters are present during various programmes and national events, promoting greater inclusion across different public spheres. Additionally, there has been a notable increase in the number of people enrolling in sign language classes. This indicates a growing societal awareness and desire to bridge communication gaps in the country for effective and genuine social inclusion.

Despite this progress, MACODA recognises that more needs to be done to effectively promote and protect rights of deaf persons in the wider society through the use of sign language. Therefore, we call upon all stakeholders to intensify efforts:

- We urge all media institutions across Malawi to integrate sign language interpreters into all their programmes to ensure no person is left behind.
- We call upon the Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA) to enforce the communication law with respect to statutory obligations for all public and private media

institutions to ensure access to information for all and disability inclusive communication through the use of certified sign language interpreters.

- It is imperative that all events, whether public or private, national or local, are equipped with sign language interpreters to guarantee equal participation and meaningful inclusion.
- Further investment by institutions in training and certifying qualified sign language interpreters is crucial.
- Most importantly, we urge all service providers to ensure that they provide all services such as education, health, finance, information, communication and technology, justice and security with consideration of sign language where needed.

In conclusion, MACODA remains committed to advocating for policies and practices that promote and protect the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities. On this International Day of Sign Languages, as a nation, let us reaffirm our collective responsibility to build a society where sign language is fully recognised, respected and accessible to all, thereby upholding the principle that no human rights can be fully realised without sign language rights.

George C. Chiusiwa

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'GOMAC', enclosed within a thin blue rectangular border.

Director General

23rd September, 2025