



PanSALB

PAN SOUTH AFRICAN LANGUAGE BOARD

SOUTH AFRICAN
SIGN LANGUAGE
CHARTER

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A CHARTER FOR SOUTH AFRICAN SIGN LANGUAGE

INTRODUCTION

WHEREAS the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) was foreshadowed in section 6(5) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996 (the Constitution), and established through the Pan South African Language Board Act 59 of 1995, as amended by Act 10 of 1999; and

RECOGNISING that the Constitution requires PanSALB to promote and create conditions for the development and use of South African Sign Language (SASL); and

REAFFIRMING that the Constitution requires PanSALB to ensure respect for all languages commonly used by communities in South Africa; and

ACKNOWLEDGING that the Deaf community is not a single homogeneous group of people and that there are distinct Deaf communities in every country in the world, each Deaf community communicates using its own sign language and presents different cultural norms; and

CONSIDERING that South African Sign Language, referred as SASL, was officially included in the Constitution of the Republic of South African, Act 108 of 1996 as the primary language used by the Deaf community in South Africa, as well as in Sub-section 6(4) of the South African Schools Act , Act 84 of 1996, as an official language for purposes of learning at a public school, South African Sign Language is acknowledged as a fully-fledged language that is indigenous to South Africa.

THEREFORE, PanSALB, through the SASL NLB, produced this Charter that

- a) applies to all segments of the South African society;
- b) sets out key Pledges that take into consideration the interrelatedness of the challenges facing the Deaf community as well as the need for cross-sectoral policies and programmes pertaining to the needs of the Deaf community in an holistic manner;

- c) creates obligations, through the Pledges that are intended to not only improve the Deaf community's access to quality information to also ensure the effective protection of the linguistic rights of the Deaf community in a manner that is equitable and courteous.
- d) SASL be promoted herewith to be recognised in future as an official language to be included in sub-section 6(1) of the Constitution, Act 108 of 1996; and
- e) this Charter to be adopted as a Charter in terms of section 234 of the Constitution, Act 108 of 1996.

PLEDGE 1

THERE MUST BE A BETTER UNDERSTANDING, NATIONALLY, OF SASL AS A LANGUAGE IN ITS OWN RIGHT

1. South African Sign Language (SASL) is the primary language of Deaf persons in South Africa and should be respected as a language of choice to be used in all interactions. It is an indigenous language that constitutes an important element of South African linguistic and cultural heritage.
2. Notably, SASL has its own distinct grammatical structures and lexicon and it is independent of any other language. It is conveyed by means of parameters (handshapes, location, movement, palm-orientation and non-manual features). Furthermore, SASL is capable of expressing the entire range of human experience and is essential for communication in all settings. It also provides a source of delight through artistic forms of expression. In addition, SASL facilitates the expression by the Deaf community of, among others, social relationships and cultural identity.
3. Importantly, SASL is not a communication option or a tool for inclusion. Instead, it is a primary and indigenous language in its own right. Therefore, the use of SASL in all manner of communication and interaction in South Africa will be of benefit to all the people of South Africa.
4. Now, therefore, all people in South Africa should
 - 4.1 Take steps aimed at ensuring that SASL is advanced, promoted, maintained and regularly used in all aspects of life in South Africa; and
 - 4.2 Ensure that SASL is protected and preserved as part of Deaf Culture and heritage.

PLEDGE 2

THERE SHOULD BE SELF-DETERMINATION BY DEAF PEOPLE

1. The principle of equal rights and the disability movement's "Nothing about Us without Us" underlies all our claims in the charter.
2. Section 9(3) of the Constitution provides that no person may be unfairly discriminated against as amplified in section 14 of the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, Act 4 of 2000 based on, among others, disability. In line with the principle of equal rights, Deaf people have an inherent right to represent themselves in any aspect of their lives. In addition, they have the right to privacy and to expect and receive adequate advice and be consulted on an ongoing basis on their needs. The community is also based on the principle of diversity the right to understand Deaf people and their challenges in order to create a wholly inclusive society.
3. Now, therefore, all people in South Africa should
 - 3.1 accept, recognise and respect the Deaf person's inherent right to use SASL; and self-determination;
 - 3.2 create a society where SASL is advanced, promoted, maintained and regularly used in all aspects of Deaf persons' life in South Africa; and
 - 3.3 ensure that decisions are not made on behalf of Deaf people in any setting without their express involvement and participation.

PLEDGE 3

THERE SHOULD BE A PROMOTION OF LEARNING AND HIGH-QUALITY TEACHING OF SOUTH AFRICAN SIGN LANGUAGE

We recognise that South African Sign Language (SASL) is the primary means of communication of South Africa's Deaf community and an integral part of Deaf culture. The right to have access to learn and the use of SASL is not a privilege or luxury, but a basic human right for all.

Now, therefore, all people in South Africa should

1. Accept that learning, consuming and having access to SASL is recognised as a basic human right for all people.
2. Recognise that
 - 2.1 There should be a maintenance of high standards and impeccable quality in the teaching and assessment of SASL at all times;
 - 2.2 SASL Practitioners and Educators should be professionally qualified and well resourced and they should be well trained in SASL fluency and linguistics, and Deaf culture, as well as in SASL literature;
 - 2.3 Schools for the Deaf and higher education institutions should have SASL literature as major part of the SASL curriculum;
 - 2.4 All SASL educational materials should be verified by PanSALB's South African Sign Language National Language Body (SASL NLB) ;
 - 2.5 There needs to be a plan to provide continuous professional development of SASL Practitioners, Educators and Teaching Assistants, which plan should be maintained through the

creation of accessible learning opportunities and resources;

- 2.6 In the appointment of SASL Practitioners, Educators and Teaching Assistants as well as the appointment of SASL Subject Advisors, sufficiently qualified Deaf persons should be given first preference provided that minimum requirements are being met;
- 2.7 SASL Practitioners, Educators and Teaching Assistants should have access to skills development through qualifications that are accredited by the South African Qualifications Authority;
- 2.8 SASL Practitioners, Educators and Teaching Assistants should be accredited as such by a recognised skills authority;
- 2.9 Parents, guardians and caregivers of Deaf children should be afforded the opportunity to learn SASL and, where necessary, they should receive financial support from spheres of government and the private sector;
- 2.10 Early identification of deafness and deaf/blindness at clinics, hospitals and schools and the implementation of appropriate intervention measures should be promoted and be accessed at early learning with SASL exposure;
- 2.11 All Deaf children should have access to quality early childhood development, care and education in SASL;
- 2.12 Higher Education Institutions in South Africa should require students, who are studying towards a qualification in SASL related specialisation, to carry out Deaf community service before being granted the qualification;
- 2.13 A teaching and learning programme focusing on tactile signing is encouraged and should be created;
- 2.14 Different types of digital dictionaries should be developed to support SASL users and learners;

- 2.15 Every Deaf child should be allowed the joy of learning and understanding Deaf culture and SASL literature to be a part of the Deaf community in South Africa; and
- 2.16 There should be a mechanism for SASL experts to monitor and evaluate the overall use of SASL.

PLEDGE 4

MULTILINGUAL DEAF EDUCATION FOR DEAF CHILDREN SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED AND PROMOTED

We recognise that education is a fundamental human right and the main driver of development. We reaffirm our focus on efforts on access, equity and inclusion, quality and learning outcomes and the mainstreaming of South African Sign Language (SASL) in teacher training and curricula.

Now, therefore:

1. Multilingual education is a fundamental human right and the main driver of development for the Deaf child. As such, this Charter reaffirms its commitment to efforts aimed at ensuring the accessibility, equity, quality learning outcomes and the mainstreaming of SASL in the training of SASL Educators and Teaching Assistants. In this regard, SASL should be included in the ordinary South African education system including early childhood development in order to ensure a multilingual education that includes SASL in South African schools.
2. Now, therefore:
 - 2.1 All Deaf learners should enjoy the right to a multilingual education and they should be involved in decisions and choices concerning their multilingual education.
 - 2.2 The right of Deaf learners to learn other official spoken languages as an additional language subject of their choice should be given cognizance.
 - 2.3 All members of the Deaf community, including children, youth, adults and deafened adults should be provided with lifelong learning opportunities to learn, to study and to be taught using SASL.
 - 2.4 Deaf people should be provided with equitable and

increased access to quality technical and vocational education and training and higher education, research, and quality assurance.

- 2.5 Language development and communication needs of Deaf children should be given special attention in order to ensure equitable, Early Childhood Development (ECD) Foundation, Intermediate and senior phase Further Education and Training (FET) education and higher education.
- 2.6 All staff members at schools and institutions for the Deaf should have satisfactory SASL proficiency levels.
- 2.7
 - (a) Deaf children and their families should be provided with support in their SASL development from an early stage
 - (b) Hearing children of Deaf adults have the right to acquire SASL as their home language.
- 2.8 The Department of Basic Education and relevant stakeholders should increasingly provide support to ensure that suitably trained educators with a qualification in SASL are employed as SASL educators within schools.
- 2.9 When the critical mass of educators with formal qualification in SASL is adequate to service more than schools for the Deaf, then the SASL First Additional Language (FAL) curriculum should be written and SASL can be made available as a subject choice that is taught at ordinary schools.
- 2.10 There should be recognition of SASL and an understanding of Deaf culture at schools and throughout society.

PLEDGE 5

THERE SHOULD BE GUARANTEED ACCESSIBILITY TO SERVICES AND INFORMATION THROUGH SOUTH AFRICAN SIGN LANGUAGE (SASL)

The effect, among others, of having a limited use of SASL is that the Deaf community is confronted with barriers in various aspects of life. There are innumerable barriers for the Deaf community in accessing information and services and in seeking to fully participate in various activities and initiatives as a result of the limited use of SASL.

Now, therefore:

We recognise the importance of removing barriers to access to information to enable Deaf people to access local services and information and to participate fully and lead independent lives in all aspects of life.

It is our responsibility to ensure that

This SASL Charter recognises the importance of removing the barriers to enable the Deaf community to have equitable access to information and services and to participate fully and lead independent lives in all spheres of life

Now, therefore:

1. Training and awareness campaigns, including Deaf sensitisation training, should be provided on an ongoing basis, particularly for front-line employees at all entities.
2. Whenever SASL interpreting services are required, the interpreting should be carried out by SASL/Deaf Interpreters who should be registered with a recognised statutory body and who are appropriately qualified, suitable and acceptable in terms of SASL voice-over skills and knowledgeable in Deaf culture practices and in a variety of SASL interpreting settings.
3. Video-relay communications centres, consulting with local Deaf associations, should be established to enable the Deaf community to contact local authorities using SASL in case of emergency, such

as law enforcement officers, healthcare providers, and tax, financial and insurance service providers, in addition to toll-free numbers and general public services.

4. Service providers and the members of the public should be sensitive and knowledgeable towards the Deaf community and Deaf culture.
5. Responsible government entities should make technology available to facilitate public display systems so that public announcements can be made through SASL or close captioning, particularly at public transport points, train stations, airports, banks, hospitals and other similar points.
6. Close captions and subtitles should be diligently provided across all television programmes, live streaming , webTV, social media and real time captioning.
7. South African TV channels should have Deaf interpreters and SASL interpreters inserted in all TV programmes, important announcements and speeches, emergencies and national commemorations.

PLEDGE 6

PERSONS WORKING DIRECTLY WITH DEAF PEOPLE SHOULD MEET THE MINIMUM STANDARDS OF COMPETENCY IN SOUTH AFRICAN SIGN LANGUAGE (SASL)

All staff members who deal regularly with Deaf people should receive awareness training and learn basic SASL. Staff who provide essential and/or support services and deal more frequently with Deaf people, for example, social workers and police officers should receive advanced level training (Level 3).

1. It is critical that all public servants who engage with the Deaf people meet the minimum standards of competency in SASL.
2. **Now therefore:**
 - 2.1 SASL awareness and training should be mandatory for staff members in the employ of government, non-governmental organisations and the private sector who provide essential and support services to, and engage more frequently with, the Deaf community should receive Deaf sensitisation training and be taught basic conversation skills using SASL. They should reach advanced level (Level 3) of the SASL Proficiency Scale.
 - 2.2 Preference for SASL Awareness and training to government, non-governmental organisations and the private sector should be given to Deaf organisations, Deaf-owned businesses, SASL accredited practitioners, working singly and/or in collaboration with a hearing entity or individual.

PLEDGE 7

LOCAL DEAF COMMUNITIES SHOULD BE CONSULTED ON A REGULAR BASIS ON ALL MATTERS AFFECTING THEIR LIVES

Local Deaf communities should be consulted on an ongoing basis to ensure that services are appropriate for and responsive to local needs, and to promote accountability and transparency, participatory governance and coordinated partnerships.

1. In addition to promoting accountability, transparency and ensuring that the concept of participatory governance is given effect, those who provide services to members of the Deaf community should engage with the members of such a community so that coordinated partnerships with the Deaf community can be formed and enhanced.
2. **Now, therefore:**
 - 2.1 The Deaf community should be consulted on an ongoing basis to ensure that services are appropriate for, and responsive to, the needs of each local Deaf community
 - 2.2 Deaf organisations should be involved in the community service training and be invited to participate in state-supported training programmes
 - 2.3 Deaf community members should be invited to and participate in all government events and public engagements, including izimbizo, lekgotlas, Macufe, etc., and SASL interpreting services should be provided.

PLEDGE 8

PROFESSIONAL SASL INTERPRETING AND TRANSLATION SERVICES SHOULD BE READILY AVAILABLE

SASL interpreters and translators who are able to interpret effectively, accurately and impartially both receptively and expressively, using any necessary specialised vocabulary, should be readily available.

1. SASL Interpreters and translators should use their SASL skills and spoken languages skills (or any other official South African Languages including Khoe San) to bridge the communication gap.
2. The information that the SASL Interpreters and Translators hear in the spoken language should be conveyed to a Deaf person in SASL, whereas the information expressed by a Deaf person in SASL should be conveyed to the hearing people in the spoken language that they prefer.
3. **Now , therefore:**
 - 3.1 Whenever there is planning for meetings, conferences, workshops, seminars events and activities, all efforts should be made to communicate with Deaf persons well in advance in order to arrange the most linguistically appropriate services.
 - 3.2 All Deaf Interpreters and SASL Interpreters should be professionals who are fluent in the use of SASL and at least three of the official languages used in South Africa including Khoe and San languages where applicable.
 - 3.3 Deaf interpreters and SASL Interpreters should accept and honour the Code of Ethics of the profession and adhere to the Code. Deaf clients of Deaf interpreters should be empowered with the training of the Code of Ethics and the role of SASL interpreting.
 - 3.4 Deaf interpreters and SASL Interpreters should facilitate

communication in a neutral manner that ensures equitable access to information and participation.

- 3.5 Deaf people have the right to utilise Deaf Interpreters and SASL Interpreters of their own choice who are qualified, suitable and acceptable and therefore SASL users/Deaf participants should be consulted on their SASL Interpreter preferences.
- 3.6 The South African Sign Language Institute should be established as an accreditation, research, development, monitoring and quality assurance body for SASL interpreters and Deaf interpreters. The Institute shall house the National Interpreting Resource Centre which should comprise a pool of SASL interpreters and Deaf interpreters to assist in the training, regulation, and maintenance of databases of accredited, qualified and experienced professional SASL/ Deaf interpreters. The National Interpreting Resource Centre should also make SASLI accessible to whomever requires their services.
- 3.7 SASL Trainers and Interpreters should be accredited and be in possession of qualifications that are accredited by the South African Qualifications Authority.
- 3.8 Government, non-governmental organisations and the private sector should appoint and/or source SASL Interpreters for their Deaf employees for meetings, workshops and training seminars that they organise.
- 3.9 Organisations for the Deaf should monitor and evaluate the performance of SASL Interpreters and Deaf Interpreters.
- 3.10 SASL Interpreters should undergo continuous professional development (CPD) on a regular basis as may be required.
- 3.11 In all events that last for more than two hours and at which SASL Interpreters or Deaf Interpreters are required to provide interpreting services, at least two Deaf Interpreters and/or SASL Interpreters should be sourced, depending on

the situation.

- 3.12 Deaf people should be consulted on whether they prefer SASL Interpreters to stand or sit in front of their audience as they are more accustomed to visual contact with their interlocutors in every situation.
- 3.13 Tactile signing is another form of communication that takes place through feeling signs being made by the interpreter for the Deaf/blind and is related to SASL and should be made available wherever such a service is required.
- 3.14 Institutions of Higher Education, colleges and other skills development centres should provide SASL Interpreting services for Deaf students, trainers, apprentices, etc.
- 3.15 Government, non- governmental organisations and the private sector should book SASL Interpreters through registered service providers and accredited service centres – and not use grassroots interpreters that are not skilled and have not signed the Code of Ethics.

PLEDGE 9

THE SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE SERVICE AND THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC PROSECUTIONS SHOULD RESPECT DEAF PEOPLE AND THEY SHOULD:

SASL interpreters and translators who are able to interpret effectively, accurately and impartially both receptively and expressively, using any necessary specialised vocabulary, should be readily available.

1. Employ such number of Deaf interpreters country wide to be available to assist Deaf arrested and detained Deaf persons on short notice;
2. Immediately call a professional Deaf Interpreter to assist the Deaf person before he/she is required to make a statement to the SAPS or in Court;
3. Not be allowed to put a Deaf person in a cell with other suspects owing to the Deaf person's limitations to communicate;
4. See that a professional Deaf Interpreter is available at all the Court appearances of a Deaf person and that the failure to do same will authorise the Magistrate or Judge to suspend the prosecution; and
5. Interpret sub-section 35(3)(k) of the Constitution: "to be tried in a language that the accused person understands or, if that is not practicable, to have the proceedings interpreted in that language" to mean the use of a professional SASL interpreter and not a grass-root Deaf interpreter.

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