



August 28, 2018

Rt. Hon. Oulanyah Jacob L'Okori  
Deputy Speaker of Parliament  
The Republic of Uganda

**RE: Petition about Access to Education by the Deaf Children**

The Uganda National Association of the Deaf (UNAD) is a Non- Governmental Organization that brings together all categories of Deaf people including persons with multiple disabilities (e.g Deaf blind persons). UNAD promotes and advocates for access by Deaf persons to social services including education and health. In the same breadth, the Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER) is a Non- Governmental Organization which was established to promote the effective understanding, monitoring, implementation, accountability and full realization of social and economic rights in Uganda including the right to education.

UNAD and ISER, under their respective programs, both monitor and document human rights issues in the delivery of education services in Uganda, particularly, the barriers to access to quality education for children with disabilities in Uganda.

Mr. Speaker, it is upon this background that UNAD and ISER bring to your attention the issue of limited access to quality education by the deaf children in Uganda. Our petition is based on the reasons below:

1. Article 30 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda guarantees every person the right to education. Objective XVIII of the National Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy enjoins the State to promote free and compulsory basic education and take appropriate measures to afford every citizen an equal opportunity to attain the highest educational standard possible. The Education Pre-Primary, Primary and Post Primary Act, 2008 and Persons with Disabilities Act, 2006 emphasize the right of children with disabilities to free, compulsory and universal education.
2. The fundamental right to education is also affirmed by a number of international and regional instruments that Uganda has ratified including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESR), UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), UN Convention on Rights of Persons with



Disabilities (CRPD) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC).

3. The Government has made commitments in the National Development Plan II and the Sustainable Development Goals Agenda of 2030 under the theme: “*Leave no one behind*”, particularly SDG 4, to ensure the provision for free, quality and equitable inclusive education for all.
4. The rights of persons with disabilities including freedom from non-discrimination and the government’s obligation to take positive steps to address barriers faced by them in enjoying their rights are enshrined in Articles 21, 32, 35 of Uganda’s Constitution and enabling legislation including the Persons with Disabilities Act.
5. It is noteworthy that Uganda has taken measures to ensure access to education for all. Both Universal Primary Education (UPE) and Universal Secondary Education (USE) programs have increased access to education by millions of children from poor backgrounds.
6. However, despite this breakthrough, these programs have fallen short on inclusivity for children with disabilities, particularly Deaf children.
7. Access to quality education by Deaf children continues to be hindered by various barriers and absence of reasonable accommodation in education institutions. UNAD and ISER have identified the following hindrances to access to education;
  - a. At the primary school level, there are only eleven (11) schools which focus solely on provision of education to Deaf persons. Of these, six (06) are government and five (05) are private. These are complimented by more forty five (45) deaf units which are attached to mainstream primary schools and five (05) inclusive schools across the country where Deaf children learn. Compared to the need, these facilities are not sufficient to absorb all the Deaf children in Uganda. Thus, in many areas children are enrolled in mainstream schools only to drop out due to the costs and communication barrier with teachers who do not know sign language. This is expressed in the low completion rates of the children with disabilities despite the high enrolment at the beginning of primary education. For instance ***see Annex marked “A” for the enrolment and completion rates in Napak District.***



Although government and other stakeholders are pushing for/promoting inclusive education, from our experience, at the primary level more special schools are needed because this is the critical stage for language development.

- b. The situation is worse at the secondary school level. There are only three government Deaf schools in the entire country namely Mbale School of the Deaf in Mbale District, Nancy Comprehensive Secondary School for the Deaf in Lira District and Wakiso Secondary School for the Deaf in Wakiso. They are also complimented by one private school, Sharma Secondary School in Luwero district with has a special unit for the Deaf and four (04) other inclusive schools of which only one (01) is government. These are unable to accommodate all primary school leavers at secondary school level. The same schools especially government are further affected by the delay in receiving government funding in form of subvention grants. A case in point is Nancy School for the Deaf that did not receive government support in form of subvention grant for 2 1/2 years (***See Annex “B”, a request by Nancy school for the Deaf to UNAD to follow up with the Permanent Secretary Ministry of Education and Sports on their subvention grants***).
- c. A few who enroll in secondary schools especially private schools due to unavailability of the government ones in their localities have to part with hiring sign language interpreters at a minimum cost of Three hundred thousand shillings (UGX 300,000) annually. As a result those who can't afford paying school fees and sign language interpreters have been forced to stay out of school (***See Annex “C” as evidence for UNAD paying sign language interpreters for a student in Merryland High School***).
- d. Due to majority teachers being unqualified in sign language most Deaf students enroll for arts subjects because that is what their sign language interpreters can interpret for them as opposed to science subjects that appear to be more technical. This has restricted them to only arts and denied them an opportunity to pursue science career professionals.
- e. Consequently, despite majority of the Deaf students hardly ever making it to the higher institutions of learning. A few that make it are tied to pursuing humanities and social sciences courses.
- f. Those who enroll on private arrangements at higher institutions of learning have to part with hiring a sign language interpreter at a minimum cost of Three Hundred Thousand (UGX 300,000/=) monthly, on top of the tuition expense. ***Please find enclosed several letters UNAD has received from students and their families***



*requesting financial support and cheque payments made for majority of the request (marked Annex “D”).*

8. Education is a right and a public good and it is the duty of the Government to ensure that every citizen can access education on an equal basis without discrimination.
9. Both Parliament and government are commended for the commitment made in the Persons with Disabilities Act of 2006 to allocate not less than 10% of all educational expenditure to the educational needs of persons with disabilities at all levels. However, the allocation to Special Needs Education (SNE) has not complied with the above threshold for over a decade. Currently, the Ministry of Education and Sports Ministerial Policy Statement for the FY2018/19 reveals SNE budget allocation of Three Billion three hundred fifteen Million Shillings (UGX 3, 315,000,000), which amounts to 0.12% of the total education sector budget of Two Trillion seven hundred eighty two billion five hundred seventy million shillings (UGX 2, 782, 570, 000, 000). This budget is insufficient to cater for SNE as a whole, as such the amount that trickles down to education of the Deaf children cannot guarantee their access to quality education as intended by the Parliament.
10. Failure to afford Deaf persons access to education not only amounts to denial of an equal opportunity to full enjoyment and realization of their right to education and other human rights for example the right to work, right to access to information, right to health and other political and civil rights, but also perpetrates discrimination against Deaf persons on the basis of disability yet Article 21 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda provides for equality and freedom from discrimination.

**WE THEREFORE**, Mr. Speaker, seek your indulgence and pray that Parliament directs;

- i. The Ministry of Education and Sports to ensure that the Education Sector Budget for FY2019/20 complies with Sec 5(j) of the Persons with Disabilities Act of the 10% of the sector budget allocation towards the education needs of persons with disabilities.
- ii. The Ministry of Education and Sports and the National Curriculum Development Centre to incorporate sign language as a subject in the secondary school curriculum just as other languages such as Luganda to provide an opportunity for those learners who would like to take it on as a



- language to expand the pool of people who can communicate in sign language.
- iii. Both Ministry of Education and Sports and National Council for Higher Education to ensure that all Primary Teachers' Colleges and University Faculties and Colleges of Education in Uganda offer a component of sign language to ensure that there is an adequate number of teachers with sign language training around the country.
  - iv. Both Ministry of Education and Sports to ensure that at the secondary level schools have the necessary infrastructure to accommodate deaf students and that institutions of higher learning employ sign language interpreters such that deaf students enroll for programs of their choice in institutions of higher learning without the burden of additional costs.
  - v. The Ministry of Education and Sports should also undertake to collect and keep data on access to education by persons with disabilities. This data should be disaggregated by persons' disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, should you agree with the prayers raised by your humble Petitioners, we pray that you direct the Ministry of Education and Sports to present to Parliament with a comprehensive framework and strategy for committing resources towards implementation of the above orders showing a clear timeframe.

Signed by:

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Mbulamwana Joseph  
Executive Director, UNAD

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Namusobya Salima  
Executive Director, ISER

**Cc:** Rt Hon. Speaker of Parliament