

Constitutional Court fails Millions of Ugandans with Hearing Disabilities Seeking Access to Healthcare

Press Release

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The recent Constitutional Court judgment in petition No.29/2017 regarding the lack of sign language interpretation services at health facilities is a major setback for nearly 1.1 million Ugandans with hearing disabilities.

The Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER), an NGO dedicated to advancing social and economic rights in Uganda, together with the Uganda National Association of the Deaf (UNAD) and other members of the deaf community express their disappointment at the outcome of the Constitutional Court. In 2017, ISER and UNAD petitioned the Constitutional Court challenging the state's failure or omission to provide sign language interpretation at health facilities.

“The absence of sign language interpretation services at a health facility violates the right of persons with hearing impairments to access healthcare and is therefore discriminatory” says Labila Musoke, Program Officer, ISER.

Although access to healthcare as a fundamental human right is recognized in a number of international and regional human rights instruments to which Uganda is party; and the 1995 Constitution of Uganda, the court's decision failed to recognize it as such. This undermines the unique and intersecting challenges persons with hearing disabilities experience while accessing healthcare services and information.

“The court's pronouncement has failed the deaf community, which is marginalized in key public service sectors like health” remarked Robert Nkwangu, Executive Director, Uganda National Association of the Deaf (UNAD).

ISER and UNAD strongly believe that the right to healthcare is a fundamental human right and should be accessible to all, regardless of their background or ability. We will continue to advocate for the rights of persons with hearing disabilities and will file an appeal for further consideration of the matters raised before the Constitutional Court.

“We believe that all individuals should be treated with dignity and respect, and that the rights of persons with hearing disabilities must be upheld. The Court's dismissal today goes against this and fails to uphold the Constitution.” Allana Kembabazi, Program Manager, ISER

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