

Differently abled valuable in national affairs - Siliya

Chief Government Spokesperson Dora Siliya has assured persons with disabilities that Government will continue to value their contributions and participation in national affairs.

Ms. Siliya says persons with special needs are important and occupy a special place in Government's development agenda.

Speaking when she met a delegation from the Zambia Deaf Society (ZDS) in her office today, Ms. Siliya said Government will continue to recognize equal rights for all human beings regardless of their physical abilities.

She said Government through her office has undertaken to ensure that all Government policies, programmes and projects are visible to all citizens including the deaf.

"As a people and as Government we have to ensure that we mainstream issues if disabilities including the deaf in all social, economic and political activities to make your life easier," Ms. Siliya said.

And Ms. Siliya has advised television stations across the country to seriously consider engaging interpreters for persons with hearing challenges as a way of ensuring that they are not left behind.

She said in the wake of the outbreak of the covid-19, there was need for all media institutions to ensure they find means of reaching out to as many people as possible especially the physically challenged adding that the disease has not spared anyone.

Ms. Siliya, who is also Minister of Information and broadcasting Services, said her ministry will engage the Zambia Institute of Public Health (ZIPH) on how best information on COVID-19 can be packaged so that it caters for all sections of society, including the deaf.

She said Coronavirus is real and it is not sparing anyone hence the need for information about the disease to reach everyone.

"We might think that this information is available to all and yet there are still pockets of people with special needs who really need it to be specifically tailored for people like you," she said.

Ms. Siliya also added that through the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) Government has provided adverts on Covid-19 that are broadcast in sign language but that this may not be enough hence the need for all stakeholders to join hands.

Meanwhile, Ms. Siliya has urged persons with disabilities to engage the Citizens Economic Empowerment Commission (CEEC) among others to find out how best they can benefit from the various empowerment funds.

Ms. Siliya said all empowerment funds are meant to benefit all citizens regardless of their social status.

“These empowerment funds are meant for all citizens including yourselves and that’s why we want to link you up with CEEC and other government agencies to see how best you too can benefit from these funds,” she said.

Speaking earlier, ZDS president Moses Soko said the deaf community feels left out especially on information concerning COVID-19 because most of the information is not designed to cater for the deaf.

He said his organisation is worried because even those conducting public sensitization programmes in communities do not have sign language interpreters making it difficult for the deaf to understand what is going on.

Mr. Soko said the deaf in the communities are not aware of places where they can go to have themselves tested for COVID-19 because of their inability to hear.

“We don’t want to be left out as the deaf in all Government activities, we are worried as the deaf community that the numbers are rising but still we feel that we are being left out when it comes to information reaching out to the deaf community on COVID-19. Information on ways of protecting themselves is not reaching them as we don’t know of any deaf person in our community who has tested positive or who has gone for testing at all,” he said.

And speaking during the same meeting ZDS Director-General John Ndhlovu said there is need for Members of Parliament to have sign language interpreters in their constituencies as they campaign next year.

He said this will help deaf electorates to get the campaign messages and make informed decisions.

And ZDS Assistant Director Sidney Ngenda appealed to Government to consider having sign language interpreters on Parliament television.

Mr. Ngenda said this will help the deaf community to follow the debates and proceedings when parliament is sitting.

He said Government through the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Services should consider engaging other television stations on the need to cater

for the hearing impaired by having sign language interpreters during news and other important programmes.

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