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The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc. (RID) Issues Statement about "Interpreting Services" at the Nelson Mandela Memorial Services

The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc. (RID) joins the Deaf people of South Africa, the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD), the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI) and the U.S. National Association of the Deaf (NAD) in expressing our disappointment and dismay at the incomprehensible interpreting services provided at the commemoration services honoring the life and legacy of Nelson Mandela.

Mandela once said, "If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart."

The legacy of Mandela represents a commitment to civil rights and human rights. The United Nations recognizes access to language as a basic human right. The very rights for which Mandela fought were violated for Deaf people during his memorial ceremony yesterday. The planners for the event failed to provide appropriate interpretation services to communicate the international tributes to Mandela to the hearts of the international Deaf community.

What happened yesterday took place in a very public manner. Unfortunately, the hiring of unqualified interpreters occurs every day and in every setting, including doctor's offices, courtrooms, places of employment, and in classrooms.

We are humbled to walk in the footsteps of this man who took every opportunity to find a positive forward-thinking, forgiving attitude in the face of adversity. In keeping with that spirit, we must use this as a opportunity to educate everyone for the need for qualified signed language interpreting in every venue and at every crossing to fight for the access that qualified interpreters provide .

How can we prevent this unfortunate and oppressive situation from happening again?

Those who hire interpreters such as Federal governments, state agencies, and private businesses are often unfamiliar with sign language and sign language interpreting practices and thus, to provide services that are accessible, those entities must include those who understand the language and culture of Deaf people in the hiring process. The Deaf community and interpreters have come together to set standards and define qualifications for sign language interpreters that are critical to achieving communication access.

These standards are often manifest in external screenings and certifications which hiring entities



can rely upon. External and objective certification programs are an important measure to define standards and skills for sign language interpreters which, in turn, maximizes communication accessibility for Deaf persons.

The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf is, and has been, committed to working with the Deaf community to establish standards so that the presence of unqualified interpreters can be avoided in the U.S. We support the efforts of Deaf South Africans to continue to work toward establishing standards and requirements for interpreters to prevent this unfortunate situation from happening again. The Deaf community and interpreters throughout the world must come together to define and advocate for communication access standards that bring us closer to what Mandela — Madiba — dreamed: communicating in the Deaf community's language to reach the hearts of Deaf people worldwide.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gf4hOxG0J2I>