
EDITORS/REPORTERS

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**MEDIA STATEMENT: CRL RIGHTS COMMISSION COMMEMORATES THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE SOWETO UPRISING; CELEBRATING LINGUISTIC FREEDOM AND THE ASCENDANCE
OF SOUTH AFRICAN SIGN LANGUAGE.**

Today, the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious, and Linguistic Communities (CRL Rights Commission) joins many in our nation to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the June 16, 1976, Soweto Uprising.

Five decades ago, the youth of South Africa took to the streets to challenge the oppressive imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. This historic protest was not merely a rebellion against a curriculum; it was a profound assertion of identity and a demand for the right to be taught in languages that reflected the lived realities and heritage of the majority. The 1976 uprising remains a sombre reminder that language is a fundamental tool of empowerment and that the suppression of linguistic rights is an affront to human dignity.

In alignment with our constitutional mandate to promote and protect the rights of linguistic communities and to encourage the use of all South African languages, the Commission views this 50th anniversary as a pivotal moment for reflection. We honour the sacrifices of the class of 1976 by ensuring that no language is marginalized in our democracy.

This year, the Commission places special focus on South African Sign Language (SASL), recently recognised as the country's 12th official language. The inclusion of SASL marks a historic step toward inclusivity and equality, affirming the rights of the Deaf community to full participation in all spheres of life. Through the theme "Strength in Silence", the Commission celebrates the Deaf community's resilience and contributions to South Africa's cultural and linguistic diversity.

“The 1976 uprising taught us that language is a site of struggle, but also a site of victory,” says the Chairperson of the CRL Rights Commission, Mrs Thoko Mkhwanazi-Xaluva. “By officially recognising South African Sign Language, our country has taken a giant leap toward total inclusivity. This June 16, we honour the Deaf community whose voices have long been felt through their hands and hearts. Their 'Strength in Silence' mirrors the bravery of the students of 1976 who refused to be silenced through whatever means ever possible.”

The Commission calls upon all sectors of society, government, private institutions, and educational bodies, to actively promote the use of SASL and all indigenous languages. We believe that true social cohesion can only be achieved when every citizen, regardless of their mode of communication, feels heard, respected, and represented.

As we mark this golden jubilee of the Soweto Uprising, let us renew our commitment to protecting our linguistic diversity. Let us ensure that the blood spilled in 1976 continues to water the seeds of a truly multilingual and inclusive South Africa.

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