**SPEECH BY GERARD QUINN  
SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

**On the occasion of the 2021 International Day of Sign Language celebrations organized by the UN Office at Geneva (UNOG)**

**23 September 2021**

Hello.

My name is Gerard Quinn and I am the new United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities.

It is a real pleasure to join you today on the International Day of Sign Language. This day is an important opportunity to celebrate, to support and to protect the distinctive linguistic identity and cultural diversity of all deaf people and other sign language users around the world.

Using sign language is a human rights issue. It ensures that discussions are accessible, helps combats exclusion and discrimination, and it gives real-life meaning to the “leaving no one behind” commitment. Sign language is vital to ensure that the rights of deaf persons are upheld. We have seen it so strikingly during the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, that having information available in sign language can make an enormous difference, a life-and-death difference, in the lives of persons with disabilities.

We know that the international community has made some progress in providing sign language and interpretation, in terms of the legal status of sign language, including in meetings and conferences, as well as information materials and human rights training. We should see more of it being made available, including for example, at the Human Rights Council itself, here in Geneva.

More still needs to be done.

Sign interpretation should be a standard, and not a bonus, in meetings, gatherings and information sharing activities. The diversity of deaf people and all sign language users not only has to be recognized and celebrated, but also valued and implemented in real life, [including] for example, by making sure that all meetings and documents are made fully accessible to the deaf and sign language users.

“We sign for human rights” is this year’s theme for the International Day. While we are all different, we are all equal. I look forward to working with you to advance the distinctive linguistic rights and identity [rights] of deaf people worldwide.

Thank you very much.

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