**Deaf Aotearoa’s oral statement for the DGD on article 11 of the CRPD**

**7 March 2023**

Kia ora, my name is Anthony Sammons and I am the Chair of Deaf Aotearoa’s Executive Board. Deaf Aotearoa is the Disabled People’s Organisation for the Deaf community in New Zealand. Deaf Aotearoa’s vision is ‘full access’. Full access to information is particularly important for Deaf people in emergency situations. Without full access, Deaf people are at risk of making wrong decisions, such as failing to evacuate in time, or deciding to travel on dangerous roads. Full access to information saves lives.

New Zealand has recently been impacted by tropical Cyclone Gabrielle which struck New Zealand’s North Island in February. At least 11 people died, and thousands have been displaced. Deaf Aotearoa worked very closely with the Government’s Civil Defence and Emergency Management teams to make sure that all televised information was interpreted into New Zealand Sign Language. Deaf Aotearoa also posted its own information across its social media platforms.

It is of critical importance that information is provided in sign language so that Deaf people have access to the same information as everyone else. No Deaf person should be left behind as a result of communication barriers. Government’s must ensure that full access to comprehensive information is provided in emergency situations, and they must be trained in knowing how to access and use interpreters at short notice. Sometimes there is gap in coverage for those in the affected areas. To rectify this, there needs to be a commitment to the provision of local and regional emergency information in formats that Deaf people can access quickly.

New Zealand and our Pacific Island neighbours are increasingly at risk of environmental disasters exacerbated by climate change. It is therefore vital that the rights of Deaf people to full access to information is upheld in all situations of risk. Deaf Aotearoa recommends that this is what state and non-state parties must commit to, and there should be a clear directive in article 11 that reflects this.

Thank you.