



**BLIND SA**

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SUBMISSION TO THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ON  
MATTERS RELATING TO THE UNCRPD

1. INTRODUCTION

It may seem not important to remind the Committee that South Africa ratified and signed for a United Nations Convention on Rights for Persons with Disabilities in 2007; and following the provisions of article 4: "General Obligations", South Africa agreed to bind itself by the UNCRPD. However, it becomes appropriate in the spirit of us trying to address matters which are still subjected to undue isolation by our government and its departments/institutions that we premise our submission right there.

We would like to make inputs regarding the UNCRPD's implementation so that we play a role in shaping our country's future with equal opportunities for all.

2. POSITION OF BLIND SA

Blind SA is a national consumer organisation affiliated to the South African National Council for the Blind and, thus, has a role to advocate for blind South Africans by, among other means, engaging stakeholders and advising accordingly.

We therefore raise the following items for consideration by the Parliamentary committees involved in this regard:

3. ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION AND OTHER FACILITIES [ARTICLE 9 1(B) AND 2(A), (F) AND (G)]

3.1 Websites

It is regrettable that only a year after ICASA summit that was held in March 2011, many of the problems that were raised are not being attended to.

Websites have been a haunting phenomenon to the blindness sector for ages. This matter had been confronted on various fronts e.g engaging the companies whom we believe are providing service to the general public and blind people in particular.

We would like the committee to help the sector in ensuring that websites are accessible. This could be achieved by involving blind people when the upgrade and

development of the sites are done so that relevant and accommodative inputs are thus made (Article 21 (c) and (d)).

### 3.2 Radio Broadcast

Blind people rely on radio as their primary source of information. Broadcasting of some sporting codes had since been a problem to some radio stations. We submit that all sporting codes be broadcast in the spirit of giving blind people access to information. The notion that some codes are for the minority, thus are given less preference, is not in the spirit of unity and popularising those codes.

We must avoid the imbalances of the past by exposing these codes to everyone so that people can have wider spectrum of choice.

### 3.3 Weather and Financial Indicators

This matter had been raised with the SABC for quite some time and, ostensibly, the national broadcast is not willing to lend an ear. Blind people need, too, to know temperatures and financial indicators as they appear on screen. It will be important if the presenters could be cautioned to read out temperatures of at least big cities clearly so that we can have equal access to our sighted peers; and financial indicators to be read out clearly too.

### 3.4 Electricity and water prepaid meters

#### 3.4.1 Prepaid electricity

Prepaid electricity meter boxes are generally touch screen. This is a barrier for blind prepaid meter users since they cannot themselves punch in numbers. Furthermore, the system cannot communicate back to the blind user the amount of electricity left for use. We are always advocating for practical and maximum independence of blind people. This is informed of the fact that we have families of blind people alone who deserve full and independent lifestyle. We feel that this area would require full implementation of reasonable accommodation (Article 5 3) and independence guaranteed under Article 19(a).

#### 3.4.2 Prepaid water meters

This system implores the use of a magnetic chip that gets into contact with the system and loads water litres purchased. Albeit this sounds easy, a blind person cannot, unfortunately, determine the amount of litres loaded or remaining litres for use without assistant by another. We feel that this area needs spheres of government delivering service in this manner to reasonably accommodate blind people (Article 5 3).

#### 4. DISABILITY STICKERS

Normally persons with physical challenge do have access to parking stickers meant for the parking of their vehicles or those vehicles that are transporting them.

We would like to propose that blind people be given access to these stickers since they require assistance that would, in most cases, mean that a driver abandons the car for some time.

#### 5. STUDY MATERIAL

It had been a trend that, because of the lengthy processes in the production of Braille material, that textbooks and other related material is often delivered to learners fairly late.

We therefore suggest that the committee looks into encouraging the Department of Basic Education to start the process timeously so that the delivery of material takes effect in a reasonable time that will allow a blind learner to timely start with his/her studies (Article 21 (a)).

#### 6. ASSISTIVE DEVICES

Assistive devices for blind people have almost become unaffordable. With the limited number of suppliers in South Africa, we find prices of these devices exorbitant; this is against the background of all poor blind people.

We would like government to assist in making these devices accessible to blind people, perhaps by way of a subsidy.

#### 7. ACCESSIBLE LITERATURE

South Africa is encouraging people to read; this campaign should not leave blind people out.

We therefore call on government to encourage blind people to read and make available material in Braille and other formats for them to read. This will be in the spirit of the Promotion of Access to Information.

#### 8. BROAD-BASED BLACK ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Affirmative action and the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment are meant to create equal opportunities for all, particularly **previously disadvantaged communities and, understandably, it befits to remedy the imbalances of the past.**

Article 4(b) of the UNCRPD permits a state to have legislation that will redress these imbalances. However, Article 5 sub article 1 states that all "States parties recognise that

**all persons are equal** before and under the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the **equal protection and equal benefit** of the law”.

In terms of sub article 2, States shall prohibit any discrimination against anyone on the basis of disability and entitle anyone legal protection on **all grounds**.

The amendment of the BBBEE legislation that amounts to white women not being given equal opportunities to compete is clearly against this spirit. White women were discriminated against on two fronts: (a) in that they were women; and (b) in that they were disabled.

The intended amendment may not have sufficient ground to be effected since it would not be addressing the previous imbalances on that portion of community and would be tantamount to unfair discrimination.

## 9. RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend to the Committee –

- that all affected departments/institutions be brought on board in trying to resolve these issues;
- That Departments/institutions be made aware that before implementing any policy/legislation or delivering service, sufficient consultations are done that would include blindness sector;
- That in terms of Article 4(g), government undertakes research that will help in curbing down prices for assistive devices and other technology used by blind people;
- That in terms of Article 6 sub article 1, government relooks at the BBBEE and Employment legislation averting a situation were unfair discrimination may arise;
- That government subsidises all institutions that have O&M programmes so that they can be accessible and affordable to all blind people;
- That universal design for products that are of communal use is desirable; and
- That government is constantly reminded of its Constitutional obligation to serve its people without prejudice and unfair discrimination.

Kind regards



CJ Donaldson (Miss)  
President  
Blind SA