

Tuesday, 29th May, 2018

The Speaker (Hon. Lusaka): Sen. Olekina, be brief so that we make progress.

Sen. Olekina: Mr. Speaker, Sir, I notice that the Chair of CPAIC has just entered but I just want to shed some light. I want to assure this House that the CPAIC is working daily to table a lot of reports. I want to assure Sen. Sakaja that the amount of work that we have done is not equal to the amount of work that was carried out by the previous committee. We had a lot of work which had not been completed. The first time when we met, we worked day in day out to complete those reports. I assure this House that the Chairman is doing what the previous committee did not do because of the number of court cases which slowed down the process.

The other thing is the issue that we have deliberated, which the Senate Majority Leader talked about, is dividing the Committee into sub-committees. We have already established sub-committees to work on the reports. I want to assure you that within a short time, we will table reports and move on. I assure Sen. Sakaja and the entire House that we will make progress.

We do not summon governors but we invite them first. When they fail to appear, we move ahead to summon them. The Chair can bear me witness that we have made a determination that when a governor refuses to appear before us upon the invitation, the next thing is to summon them.

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Sen. Olekina: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, for giving me this opportunity to support Sen. (Dr.) Musuruve's Motion. First of all, let me talk about the history so that we understand where I am coming from. When we talk about introducing Kenyan Sign Language (KSL) in schools or when trying to come up with a Motion to ensure that people can be trained to speak in Kiswahili through sign language, what is the history of the entire sign language in this country?

If history serves me right, KSL was introduced through the support of the United States Peace Corps Volunteers in 1960s. I thank the former President of USA for having done so. We are not shifting from KSL to Kiswahili Sign Language. In essence, very few schools with deaf students teach KSL. We have over 600,000 deaf people in this country. Many of them cannot even converse.

Parents of Maasai deaf children just come up with an idea on how they can talk to them, but they do not have skills to communicate. We need to put this thing into context and ask ourselves some serious questions on what we need to do. Do we have a proper legal framework that ensures deaf people are supported to learn just like any other citizens in this country?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, what Sen. (Dr.) Musuruve is doing will help this House narrow it down and come up with legislation that will make it mandatory for all institutions in this country – whether or not there are deaf children – to teach Kiswahili

language. We need to ensure that children in those schools learn both Kiswahili Sign Language and KSL.

Secondly, we must also create incentives. We might come up with provisions of the law that requires every institution to teach sign language, but not get interpreters. From a business perspective, Kenyans should consider taking up this training. I was listening to the radio while coming here and I heard my colleagues speaking.

I heard the Chairperson of the Committee on Education speaking about multi-linguals and why it is important for people to be able to speak different languages. This is an incentive for job creation in this country. So, if we convert this Motion into a piece of legislation we will encourage our people to learn sign language. We will have others who will acquire interpretation skills. We have very few interpreters in this country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, do we have a dictionary of a Kenyan Kiswahili Sign Language in this country? Do we even have a Kenyan Kiswahili Dictionary like Tanzania? I know that a dictionary for the Kenyan Sign Language was first developed in 1991 from the *American Alphanumeric Sign Language*. We need to figure out what we need to do to support our dear brothers who, unfortunately, were brought into this world with the disability of not being able to converse.

It is very frustrating to find sharp people with intelligent brains who cannot converse. There is a young Samburu boy in Gilgil who is one of the best artists in this country who cannot talk but can use his skills. Therefore, there is no way anyone can negotiate for him so that he can sell whatever he draws for more money that will benefit him.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, as we look at this, we should also look at all other opportunities that exist or can be created by encouraging our institutions to teach Kenyan Kiswahili Sign Language.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, in Narok County, where I come from, there is only one school which is not equipped, and has no resources or interpreters. We need to empower and create this training programme or a certificate process to ensure that once we have people who are able to interpret Kiswahili, it can trickle down. We need to analyze whether to start by training the trainers so that when they go down to the counties, the county governments can take on this.

The foundation of basic education is a key to everything in this country. Actually, if one has a proper foundation in human development, they will excel anywhere they go around the world. However, if one has a shaky foundation academically, it might make it difficult for them to express themselves or compete with everyone else.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, this Motion is quite timely; it is something that questions us. God has blessed our nation with brothers and sisters who are disabled. Now that I am able to talk but they cannot talk, does it make them lesser persons? Now that we in authority have devolved part of the basic education to the county governments, we need to start from there. We need to train interpreters, who can start engaging young children who are born with disabilities and train them to speak.

I request my sister to think more about all the languages that we have in Kenya. For example, a Maasai child will first of all think in the Maasai Language before he or she thinks in Kiswahili. A Kalenjin child will first think in the Kikalenjin language before Kiswahili.

Other Senators have spoken about Kenya not having a national language. I am one of those few people who struggle to speak Kiswahili. I, therefore, imagine a child in Murang'a, Samburu or Narok counties who is having a difficult time communicating with their parent through the mother tongue because he or she is deaf, now being able to be trained in Kiswahili. So, if we talk about Swahili being a national language, we then have to consider everyone in the society.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I see this as a great business opportunity. Many Kenyan youths complain that they have been left out and they have no jobs. Kenyans out there should now start becoming creative. They should go out there and, may be, start an institute to train these interpreters and develop work with the resources that we have in other libraries and try to put together something that can bridge between Kiswahili and our vernacular languages because we cannot ignore them.

I appreciate the fact that media houses nowadays have people who try to interpret both in Swahili and English. However, knowing what I know now, I wonder whether people are able to follow those who interpret in Swahili. Since this is not something which is taught, I commend the few Kenyans who understand the Kiswahili Language.

Sen. (Dr.) Musuruve has rightly brought this Motion to the House and it is something that all of us must ensure that is passed and implemented. For example, when you go to Tharaka-Nithi County, you can converse with the children or understand those who speak in Swahili Sign Language because it might be difficult for them to speak in English at that early age or they might have a bridge between their Kimeru Language or the language you speak in Tharaka-Nithi County because you have many other people there.

The Deputy Speaker (Sen. (Prof.) Kindiki): Order, Senator.
Proceed.

Sen. Olekina: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I, thank you.