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Referred to  
"Segreteria XII Commissione Affari Sociali"

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## Recognizing Italian Sign Language (LIS)

Dear Sirs,

The Deaf Association of Berlin is the main association that represents the political and cultural interests of Deaf people living in the German capital.

We appreciate the process that has been taken to recognise Italian Sign Language as the language of Deaf people in Italy. However, with great dismay we have been informed by Deaf Italians living in Berlin about the current situation. It has been proposed that Lingua dei Segni Italiana, (LIS), the natural language of Deaf people, should be replaced by a rudimentary system called Linguaggio Mimico Gestuale (LMG). We state and reinforce that LMG is not the natural language of Deaf people in Italy, and does not follow the natural structure of other sign languages. We are shocked about this ignorance of Human Rights.

Like other sign languages, LIS, or Italian Sign Language has its own grammatical structure which is separate in structure to spoken Italian. LMG is not a natural language, it is a system of communication that has been artificially created to supplement the spoken Italian language, much like a pidgin system. It is thought that users of LMG may be seen as having a better understanding of spoken Italian. They may be able to communicate orally with the support of some signs or gestures. However there is extensive linguistic research that shows that this use of artificially created signs with a spoken language does not mean they are using a different language. They are using a way to communicate.

Whereas, LIS has developed naturally in Italy and is a fully fledged language that is used by over 80,000 Italians. For a lot of these users, learning Italian Sign Language is their key to the world. There would be extreme implications if the users of this language were not able to have

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the opportunity to learn LIS. To recognise LIS would enable opportunities for these users to learn and understand language.

Sign languages are officially recognised in many countries around the world as a language unique to its own country. Since 2002, German Sign Language (DGS) has been recognized by law as a language that is equal in status to spoken German.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognises sign language in many different articles. (Article 2, Article 30 Paragraph 4). Like the German government and the EU, Italy has signed and ratified the UN Convention. Giving support to LMG as a system of communication for deaf people in Italy would be breaching the spirit of the Convention. LMG is not a sign language, it is a system of communication.

There is strong international support for the unique status of LIS to be recognised, and 7370 people have signed a petition supporting LIS over LMG. (Statistics current as of 24 May 2011). The petition can be accessed online at <http://www.petiziononline.it/petizione/lingua-dei-segni-italiana/848>

We urge further consultation and understanding of this situation with the users of Italian Sign Language.

We also pledge for LIS to be recognised as a distinct language equal to the spoken Italian language.

Yours sincerely,



Andreas Bittner  
(President of Berlin Deaf Association)