

Beat: Vips

Sign language interpreter at Mandela memorial called a fake;

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USPA News - A man who appeared to provide sign language interpretation as U.S. President Barack Obama and other heads of state delivered tributes during Tuesday's memorial service for anti-apartheid icon Nelson Mandela has been called a `fake` by experts. Bruno Druchen, the national director of the Deaf Federation of South Africa, said the unidentified sign language interpreter is not a professional interpreter.

"To the best of our knowledge he has not undergone any formal training in South African Sign Language or interpreting offered by any recognized institution which offers these training courses," he said. The fake interpreter stood next to leaders from around the world as they delivered tributes for Mandela, who died last Thursday at the age of 95. Tuesday's event was one of the most significant memorial services in decades and was attended by nearly 100 sitting and former heads of state. It was broadcast live around the world. David Buxton, chief executive of the British Deaf Association (BDA), agreed that the interpreter was a fraud. "The `signer` was not using South African Sign Language, but merely producing repeated hand-waving gestures," he said. "This was insulting to both the South African Deaf Community and, indeed, the Deaf Community Worldwide." Druchen noted that the interpreter did not use facial expressions, which are used to give meaning to signs. "Facial expression plays a very important part in the meaning of a sign. The same exact hand-shape and movement can totally change meaning because of the facial expression that is used to accompany it," he explained. He added: "The self-invented signs the interpreter used are not used in South African Sign Language and it is a total mockery of the language. The interpreter did not use the established, recognized signs for President Mandela, President Zuma, President Thabo Mbeki and South Africa amongst many others." It was not immediately clear how the unidentified man was chosen to provide sign language interpretation at Tuesday's event, but the South African government said it was investigating the matter. "The organizers of the memorial service, and indeed any event, should have contacted organisations who coordinate South African Sign Language interpreting services to secure a professional, trained experienced interpreter," Druchen said. The White House also expressed regret that a fake interpreter stood next to Obama and other heads of state. "It's a shame that you had a service that was dedicated to honoring the life and celebrating the legacy of one of the great leaders of the 20th century has gotten distracted by this and a couple of other issues that are far less important than the legacy of Nelson Mandela," a spokesman said.

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