

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



THE PRESIDENCY

MEDIA RELEASE

(FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE)

22 June 2020

Windhoek

All Media

Statement Attributable To The Press Secretary, Dr. Alfredo Tjiurimo Hengari

By engaging in much ado about nothing reporting, The Namibian newspaper is disturbingly undermining our collective success as the country with the freest Press in Africa

In the evening of 21 June 2020, at the time when The Namibian newspaper went to print a hyped-up, sensational and Shakespearean much ado about nothing comedy style report "Confusion as presidency shuts out media", The Namibian was in possession of a media invite extended to all media in the country to cover the 22 June 2020 COVID-19 Update by President Hage G. Geingob. Still, The Namibian went ahead to print a report it knew as disinformation, misleading and false. Moreover, prior to The Namibian going to print, the Press Secretary, Dr. Alfredo Tjiurimo Hengari had two conversations with Ms. Charmaine Ngatjiheue, a reporter at a newspaper, which prides itself for "Still Telling It Like It Is".

In the first conversation at 16h59, lasting 50 seconds, the Press Secretary confirmed to Ms. Charmaine Ngatjiheue that reservations to cover the media briefing as per practice must be arranged with Ms. Sharonice Busch and Mr. Dennis Shikwambi. Yet, Ms. Ngatjiheue went willfully ahead with a fully sanctioned much ado about nothing campaign of propaganda, fabricating a "news report" and alleging that the Press Secretary referred her to Ms. Sharonice Busch to explain "why the media was not invited". It is unclear why the Press Secretary in the Presidency would defer such an important decision and explanation to Ms. Busch. For the reader, it becomes blatantly clear that the claim is nothing but barefaced misinformation, which undermines the Code of Ethics for Namibian Journalists. For a trained journalist to invent and attribute comments that were not uttered is a low point for media ethics.

In the second conversation at 19h13, lasting six minutes, the Press Secretary sought clarity from Ms. Ngatjiheue why the newspaper went ahead with a tweet and a Facebook post, including an online

article alleging that “key” media organizations were not invited to cover the Covid-19 Update of 22 June 2020. The Press Secretary emphasized to the reporter that there were no reasons why the media would not be invited to the Update. In fact, at that time, The Namibian was in full possession of an invitation to the COVID-19 Update from The Presidency. These facts, notwithstanding, The Namibian, which prides itself for “Still Telling It Like It Is” went ahead with a report it knew was fictitious, illogical, invented and without basis. Worse, in the report, The Namibian censored many parts of the exchange, including where the Press Secretary emphasized that all media were invited to the Covid-19 Update. It is obvious why the exchange needed to be sanitized to suit a hatchet job and bouquet of dishonesties.

The Namibian should ask itself is: why is it only one newspaper making such a preposterous claim about the media not invited to cover the press briefing? In fact, media houses and journalists all received the invitation and one should ask where The Namibian got this piece of news about the media not invited to a press briefing. A media briefing without the media?

Consider this, The Namibian has two versions of what transpired, which is ample manifestation of a concoction of a bunch of falsehoods. In tweets and Facebook posts of The Namibian, The Presidency announced the Covid-19 Update on Sunday morning, and in the print report, the paper says the exact contrary of what it shared with the public on Sunday 21 June 2020, alleging that the Presidency announced the Presidential Covid-19 Update late in the afternoon. The objective is an orchestrated campaign of disinformation tailored to a political agenda whose end goal is to create the impression that The Presidency undermines press freedom. With the Access to Information Bill currently in the National Assembly, disinformation should be invented to find new fault lines to create the impression that all is not well with Press Freedom in the country. According to Reporters Without Borders, the contrary is true – press freedom is alive and well in Namibia, with the country retaining the top position in Africa for two consecutive years and sitting pretty in top tier countries globally.

It deserves emphasis that The Presidency has official accounts on social media and a footprint reaching around 500 000 followers. In that vein, it is duty-bound to share information on those platforms with the broader public about the activities of the President. Sharing information on our social media platforms does not in any way imply media exclusion from covering activities of the Presidency. Logically, an invitation to the media to cover an event is a separate activity from announcing an activity on the official information dissemination channels of The Presidency.

The Geingob Presidency prides itself for its high degree of transparency, accountability and media openness. Media access to the Presidency is widely acknowledged, with one High-Level visitor from the West lauding in the presence of local journalists President Geingob for the unprecedented degree of media access to high-level meetings, way above what he experiences in Western democracies. Meetings of President Geingob are open to the media, and press conferences of President Geingob last on average one hour thirty minutes - way beyond traditional norms in order to accommodate questions from the media. The Namibian can engage in much ado about nothing journalism, but the commitment of The Presidency to champion press freedom will continue unabated. As enunciated by President Geingob, in our work with the media, we will pursue forcefully the ethos of "no one should feel left out".

ISSUED BY THE PRESIDENCY OF THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

MEDIA ENQUIRIES

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