

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



THE PRESIDENCY

MEDIA RELEASE

(FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE)

3 August 2020

Windhoek

All Media

Presidency Reaffirms Commitment to Press Freedom and Appeals for Unifying and Tolerant Journalism

On Friday, 31 July 2020, the President of the Republic of Namibia, H.E Dr. Hage G. Geingob addressed the nation for the 14th COVID-19 Update. The Geingob Presidency prides itself for its highly lauded degree of transparency, accountability and media openness. The 14th COVID-19 Update to which the press was invited lasted for slightly over two hours. This is a way above the norm and is a demonstration of a media-friendly environment President Geingob promotes in line with the pledge of Government to champion press freedom. President Geingob is driven by the ethos of “no one should feel left out” and accomodates as many questions as possible, and Friday 31 July 2020 was no exception.

A junior journalist from NAMPA requested the President to ask questions outside purview of COVID-19, to which the President responded in the affirmative. The President responded to the questions, emphasizing with disappointment that the journalist was seeking to divert attention from COVID-19 by focussing on trivial matters. The point is not whether the journalist was within his right to ask so-called difficult questions. More important, it is the right of the President to express disappointment with a line of questioning that undermines the gravity of COVID-19 in favor of sensational journalism. The rights of the President, the Presidency and Government leaders to differ with journalists and the press on matters of national importance is what is at stake here. It is regrettable that sections of the press are increasingly intolerant of opposing views and healthy debate in a democracy. They are not defending the freedom of expression principle of “your rights end where mine begin”. Far from it. Arguably, the erosion of public trust in the media as per the findings of a recent Afrobarometer survey implies that there is a need for a critical re-examination of the role of the media in a democracy and the promotion of a healthy debate.

The Presidency did not at any point put pressure on NAMPA to summon or question the journalist for his views. The Presidency does not intervene in the internal affairs of NAMPA. It is blatantly clear that there is a section of the press

that is not satisfied with the collective achievement of Namibia as the country with the freest press in Africa, and in the top 25 tier globally. In seeking to undermine the country's performance and influence ratings, this divisive section of the press fabricates problems, invents incidences of harassment and gagging with the sole objective of a downgrade for Namibia in the press rankings.

The commitment of President Geingob to the principles of Unity, Liberty and Justice remains total. In that vein, the President will continue with the mission of building a more united and more resilient Namibia.

ISSUED BY THE PRESIDENCY OF THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

MEDIA ENQUIRIES

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