

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



**SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY DR HAGE GEINGOB,
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA, ON THE
OCCASION OF THE 27TH INDEPENDENCE DAY
CELEBRATION**

RUNDU

MARCH 21, 2017

Check against delivery

Director of Ceremonies;

Comrade Nickey Iyambo, Vice President of the Republic of Namibia;

Your Excellency, the Father of the Namibian Nation and Revolution, Comrade Sam Shafiishuna Nujoma;

Your Excellency, the second President of the Republic of Namibia, Comrade Hifikepunye Lucas Pohamba;

Honourable Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of International Relations and Cooperation;

Honourable Speaker of the National Assembly;

Your Honour, Chief Justice of the Republic of Namibia;

Madam First Lady;

Honourable Ministers and Deputy Ministers in attendance;

Honourable Members of Parliament,

Distinguished Service Chiefs;

Honourable Governors;

Leaders of Political Parties;

Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Traditional and Spiritual Leaders;

Distinguished Invited Guests;

Members of the Media;

Fellow Namibians;

What is independence and why do we celebrate it? Why are we gathered here today in such large numbers?

Independence stems from an innate desire for people to exercise their free will in order to pursue their aspirations and determine their own destiny. In other words, people become independent when they are able to form a sovereign nation that is legally able to make its own decisions on domestic and foreign policy. Independence means the ability for people, the sovereigns, to elect into office, representatives that will form a sovereign government able to exercise the full range of powers a state possesses under international law.

27 years ago, on the 21st March 1990, Namibia was born; born into freedom and sovereignty; born with the legal right to determine its own destiny and that of its people. That is what our forefathers bled and died for. So we have a right to recognize this day, we have a right to celebrate this day,

because never again shall the sovereign people of Namibia be restricted by the wicked chains of colonialism; never again shall the sovereign people of Namibia be engulfed by the hateful flames of Apartheid.

For 27 years, we have been a free nation and have a right to celebrate our independence. We have a right to acknowledge this momentous day and will continue to do so for years to come, through good times and bad times.

It is therefore pleasing to be among this enthusiastic and festive crowd here in Rundu. I thank both the Kavango East and the Kavango West regions for the outstanding organization of our 27th Independence Day. You have exemplified the Harambee spirit by pulling in the same direction, and in so doing, you have repelled those retrogressive forces whose intent was to propagate their reactionary tendencies by encouraging people not to celebrate their independence. How can you boycott your own achievement? How can you boycott National Reconciliation? How can you boycott the freedom of movement and the freedom of speech/How can you boycott the desire to maintain unity, national sovereignty and human

dignity? Let the free people of Namibia celebrate their existence.

After 27 years, it would be absurd for us to deny that we have so much to be grateful for. First and foremost, we are grateful, and celebrate the fact that, despite many challenges, we have managed to maintain peace and unity in Namibia.

I am aware that there are some people in this country who are tired of peace and have made it no secret by questioning why we keep repeating to talk about peace. We are repeating ourselves because the truth cannot change. Only lies can change. Therefore we will continue reaffirming our identity by repeating the truth. We cannot also stop thanking those that supported us through difficult times. We cannot cease telling the story of our glorious history.

If you have an inglorious history, in which you brought fear, death and pain to your fellow Namibians, then you will not like to talk about your sordid history. However, if you have a glorious history in which you brought freedom, peace and hope to your fellow Namibians: you will always proclaim your history loud and clear.

The very fact that we celebrate this day as the day we attained our freedom means that we must also celebrate the peace we enjoy, since the two are inseparable. This is buttressed by the words of Brother Malcolm X who said, “You can’t separate peace from freedom because no one can be at peace unless he has his freedom”.

A key contributing factor to our peace has been our national unity. Unity is defined as a state of being one; oneness. That is why we have launched the narrative of One Namibia, One Nation. Unity is also described as the state or fact of being united or combined into one, as of the parts of a whole i.e. unification.

This is why we talk of the Namibian House, whose walls consists of the bricks representing our various tribes/ethnic groups and races, however once plastered and painted with the colours of the Namibian flag, the individual bricks are not identifiable and therefore the various bricks have been combined into one and we shall achieve unification.

Yes, we still have a long way to go with regards to unity, but that is our desire.

This is the new narrative we have started, in order to ensure that we consolidate the solid foundation that was laid by our Founding President and our Second President, who have joined us in celebration here today.

At this juncture, may I please request all of you to get up and give them a standing ovation.

Fellow Namibians,

We must be weary of centrifugal forces who are intent on destroying what took us so many years and so much blood, sweat and tears to build. It is easy to destroy but difficult to build.

If we allow Namibia to be torn apart by malicious elements, then this beautiful land of ours will struggle to recapture its pride and glory.

So when we talk of the concept of Harambee and peace, it should not be scoffed at or ridiculed; rather it should be seen in the context of promoting oneness of the mind and a concord amongst our people in order to safeguard our sovereignty. It puzzles me when I see that there are Namibians who are intent to see the Government of the day

fail, even to the point of wishing for some kind of calamity to take place and jeopardize our plans to take Namibia forward.

We are aware that after 27 years we still face many uphill challenges, most specifically with regards to our socio-economic architecture. Poverty is a scourge that continues to wreak havoc in our lives, because if one Namibian is poor, then we all are poor and we will all pay a price for that. What I am referring to in this instance is abject poverty, and not a Utopian existence in which we are all millionaires and equal.

We are talking of the provision of basic necessities to our people in order to give them a sense of human dignity.

For those with talent and ability, we want to create a favorable and friendly business climate so that they will be able to generate wealth, not only for themselves, but for the nation as a whole.

At the same time, Government will concentrate on fulfilling the needs of the underprivileged and vulnerable members of our society by bringing relief to them through the implementation of various existing and new social relief programs. This approach is encapsulated by the Marxist

dictum *“From each according to his ability, to each according to his need.”*

Our problem of poverty has been exacerbated by the fact that we are currently in the midst of financial headwinds, which have necessitated that certain austerity measures be put in place.

We took concrete steps to address the structural imbalances which we inherited.

These are not problems that were created by SWAPO or the Government of the day, but the fact remains that Namibia still has one of the highest levels of income inequalities in the world.

It is for this reason that we have embarked upon a multitude of strategies to address this, and many other social issues as per our Vision 2030, National Development Plans and the Harambee Prosperity Plan which does not replace the former plans, but is aimed at fast tracking these plans.

Furthermore, in order to make an immediate impact on the livelihoods of our most vulnerable citizens, we have increased the Old Age Social Grant.

This means the Old Age Grant which stands at N\$ 1200 in 2017 has doubled from N\$ 600 in 2014. This intervention has made a meaningful impact in reducing poverty levels, not only amongst our senior citizens, but our children as well; since many of our children are under the care of senior citizens.

On other dimensions of poverty, we decided to engage the Nation through a public dialogue on wealth redistribution and poverty eradication. Outcomes from this dialogue will culminate in a blueprint on how to eradicate poverty in Namibia by 2025. Aspects of the blueprint have also been prioritized and incorporated into the Harambee Prosperity Plan for fast tracking, and in NDP 5, to continue monitoring our progress towards the attainment of Vision 2030.

We are also exploring measures to accelerate industrialization and job creation. We are also promoting investment in the tourism, agribusiness and other labour and skills intensive sectors.

Through, the Food Bank, we are not only able to provide food for the urban poor but we are also able to provide employment of the youth through the Street Committee Program.

Unemployed youths that were in the streets, have been recruited and trained to participate in this program.

We are not saying that the Food Bank is a panacea for poverty eradication, but it is one amongst a multitude of measures being deployed to address the problem. Furthermore, we are continuing to explore how to combine this program with the Basic Income Grant. It is proven that transaction costs in providing food is more expensive than cash transfers, so we are studying how to come up with a new plan in this regard, while the Food Bank concept is used on a trial basis in Windhoek/Katutura.

For the rural areas where many Namibians depend on subsistence farming for food, we are planning to provide ploughing and crop planting services in order to assist people to increase their crop yields.

NEEEF is also a program that we intend to implement. It will have to come with conditions in regard to terms of Government tenders.

Some people are opposed to NEEEF without providing alternative proposals but it is time that all of us in Namibia

adopt the culture of sharing and assisting each other to attain human dignity.

In this regard, I would like to quote Joseph Stiglitz who said, “The only true and sustainable prosperity is shared prosperity”. So as we celebrate the gift of independence, let us also learn to share the gift of prosperity amongst one another as Namibians united behind the common cause of bringing about a prosperous future for all.

As a sign of Government’s commitment towards the improvement of the quality of life and living standards of Namibians, we continue to invest a significant share of our budget in the social sectors.

47.7% of our budget is allocated to our social sectors at a value of N\$27.44 billion, or N\$83.71 billion over the MTEF.

Fellow Namibians,

Independence has brought our people the gift of freedom of movement, the gift of free speech and the gift of forming political parties.

By so doing, it brought hope to our people, hence we hear the noise reverberating around the country. This is democracy at play.

It may sometimes give the impression of chaos, but in order to make scrambled egg, one must break the egg first. Likewise, when people have hope they talk and protest. This is because they see light at the end of the tunnel.

They have faith in, and trust in the SWAPO Party Government to deliver and we shall deliver, deliver and deliver.

We now have a free society and people are able to move and live wherever they chose, sometimes at their own detriment, such as in the case of people settling in flood plains and placing themselves at the risk of drowning. Similarly they go to our cities and towns to set up shacks, whether that area is proclaimed or not, or whether that area is serviced or not.

Unfortunately, municipalities work according to a plan and therefore people find themselves on land which may not have been demarcated for residential use.

We know people are coming for the allure of the bright lights of the city. We have witnessed the expansion of Windhoek and many other towns around the country.

The challenge now is to take these bright lights to the regions in order to curb rapid urbanisation, which leads to the increase of urban hunger and poverty.

Fellow Namibians,

Today, black people are owners of farms, cars and houses, which they have acquired with their own money.

An example of this is the Founding Father, Second President and I who bought our farms. Many Namibians in the crowd today are also owners of purchased land. This was unheard of before independence and it is a cause for celebration.

Land is an emotive issue and in order to interrogate the land problem we must first revisit our history.

When the Germans colonised Namibia in 1884, they grabbed the land and kept it until 1915, following World War One, when South Africa took over most of the land. From 1915 to 1966, there was no armed struggle waged by Namibians to reclaim their stolen land until the International Court of Justice threw out Namibia's justifiable case based on technicalities.

It was at this time when one of our gallant sons proclaimed that, "we are our own liberators, and we shall cross many rivers of blood before we achieve our freedom".

It was SWAPO that united Namibians to fight for independence and to fight for land, therefore SWAPO cannot be against Namibians owning land.

We are committed to addressing the land issue and this is why I have alluded to the fact that we need to revisit the willing buyer willing seller concept which we adopted to adhere to resolution 435. We have exhausted the concept because after 27 years, the process is slow in satisfying the wishes of the majority of Namibians.

This means we need to refer back to our Constitution which allows for the expropriation of land with fair compensation and also look at foreign ownership of land, especially absentee land owners.

If we are committed to achieving further economic growth and maintaining peace, then everyone should be open to new approaches.

In terms of Ancestral Land, we welcome proposals from all concerned Namibians so that we are able to reach a national consensus before proceeding with new measures to address the land problem. Of course, one question I ask when

addressing land is, who the owners of Windhoek and surrounding areas are.

The San people always seem to be left out of the discussion on land even though they, more than any other group of Namibians, have more of a right to claim a large proportion of this country's land.

Furthermore, let us all bear in mind that we should desist from visiting the sins of the fathers on the children of today.

Let us say that a German arrived in Namibia many years ago and stole land. Which some did.

Now on that piece of land, a white boy Harold Payne and a black boy Hage Geingob were born. Harold rightfully inherited the land from his father since he was born there. Although I was also born on that very piece of land, am denied to also own that land. That is the problem. I had to buy the land instead of grabbing it, because our Constitution emphasizes the fact that we should apply fairness in governance. Let us therefore come together and hold hands in dealing with the land problem so that we can solve it

amicably, while maintaining the strong foundations of peace, stability and unity which we have enjoyed for 27 years.

Fellow Namibians,

Today is a celebration, therefore I will not delve too deep in issues affecting our nation, since one does not spoil a birthday celebration with long a speech. I will elaborate on some of the matters I have mentioned on 12th of April during my State of the Nation address.

Therefore, let me once again give a special thanks to the Kavango East and Kavango West regions for the spectacular festivities you have arranged for our 27th Independence Anniversary. In this year of rededication, let us rededicate ourselves to unity and patriotism; let us rededicate ourselves to peace and stability; let us rededicate ourselves to nation building and the rule of law; let us take a decision to value Namibia and never forget those who sacrificed for our freedom.

Long live the people of Namibia.

Long live the Namibian revolution.

Happy 27th Birthday Namibia.