

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



**STATEMENT BY
HIS EXCELLENCY HIFIKEPUNYE
POHAMBA, PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA, ON THE
OCCASION OF COMMEMORATING
CASSINGA DAY**

4 MAY 2007

**EENGODI CONSTITUENCY,
OSHIKOTO REGION**

**Check Against Delivery*

Director of Ceremonies
Honourable Ministers
Honourable Members of Parliament
Honourable Governors
Honourable Regional and Local Councillors
Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps
Distinguished leaders of SWAPO Party and other Political Parties
Esteemed Traditional and Community Leaders
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the very outset, I wish to call upon you all to stand up so that we can observe a minute of silence in honour of our fallen patriots, who gave their lives for our freedom in the resistance against colonialism and apartheid oppression.

We are gathered here today to commemorate an event which will remain engraved in the history of our country, the Cassinga Massacre of Namibian refugees on 4 May 1978. On that fateful day, more than six hundred defenseless Namibian men, women and children were brutally massacred by the notorious troops of the racist South African regime. Many more were wounded and others became permanently disabled.

On this day, we also remember and pay homage to our fallen heroes and heroines who shed their precious blood and sacrificed their lives for the liberation of our country from colonialism and apartheid. We remember our forebearers who paved the way for us and indeed hundreds of Namibians who lost their lives at Oshatotwa in Zambia and at Otshikuku, Ondeshifiilwa, and many other places in Namibia. We remember those who were thrown in the Atlantic Ocean and those who are buried in unmarked graves in the jungles and on battlefronts here in Namibia, Zambia, Angola and other parts of Africa.

As we reflect on the tragic events of 4 May 1978 and other painful events which occurred during the years of colonial occupation of our country, we are reminded to understand that freedom and independence that we enjoy today demanded sacrifices and commitment of the sons and daughters of our soil. It was achieved through a bitter and protracted armed liberation struggle that was waged against colonialism and the illegal occupation of our country by the racist apartheid regime of South Africa.

During the course of the struggle, thousands of lives were lost. In addition, our people were subjected to extreme forms of exploitation, brutality and systematic torture. They were deprived of their birthrights in the land of their ancestors. Our people were deprived of their possessions including land and livestock. As a result, they became destitute and enslaved in the land of their birth.

It is against this brutality and barbarism that the people of Namibia rose up in arms to liberate their country from the yoke of colonial oppression. The popular resistance culminated in the achievement of national independence on 21 March 1990 when we declared to the world that Namibia is forever free and independent, that we have become a sovereign State where our people will decide their own destiny.

The commemoration of this day as a national holiday is a declaration by all Namibians that we will never forget our heroes and heroines “whose blood waters our freedom”. Their acts of selfless sacrifice, bravery and patriotism will continue to inspire us and the future generations to build a better society for all our people.

Their spirit and commitment to freedom will endure and guide us on our path towards prosperity and socio-economic development. In all our efforts to build a prosperous country, we should be inspired by the deeds of heroism, gallantry and bravery of the heroes and heroines of our Revolution.

Fellow Namibians,

As beneficiaries of the sacrifices of our fallen heroes and heroines, we as a nation, have dedicated this day as part of our patriotic duty to honour them. One way of doing so is by erecting fitting memorials in their honour, especially in places where our heroes and heroines are known to have fallen or where they have been buried. This is a demonstration of our honour and respect for those who shed their blood and gave their lives for our freedom.

It is for this reason that after independence a committee was established by the SWAPO Party to facilitate the erection of tombstones on the graves of our fallen PLAN combatants all over the country. Here in Oshikoto Region, tombstones have been erected at Eengodi, Okankolo, Onayena, Guinas, Onyaanya, Oniipa, Omuntele and Omuthiya.

Several other memorials were also erected on graves and other sites in other regions to honour our fallen patriots.

Another way in which we can keep the memories of our fallen heroes and heroines alive is by ensuring that the history of Namibia's national liberation struggle is written, told and taught to the younger generation in our schools. A nation that does not know its history will not find its way towards the future. We, as a nation, must learn from the lessons of our history in order to successfully chart our future course. Therefore, the history of our country, the bravery of our forebears and the gallantry of our freedom fighters must be part and parcel of our school curriculum.

This year we celebrated our seventeenth year of nationhood and independence. This means that we now have a substantial number of children and young adults who were born in the post independence era. Since they did not experience, or live through the brutality of apartheid, some of them may not fully appreciate the significance of a day such as this one.

I, therefore, urge our youth to equip themselves with the knowledge about the historical events that have shaped and continue to shape our society as we move towards the future.

There is no doubt we can only find solutions to the problems that we face if we know what the causes are. If we are to succeed, we cannot ignore the lessons of history. The solutions that we seek to solve the current developmental challenges must be informed by the knowledge about where we come from as a nation and where we want to go in the future.

I also believe that another fitting manner in which we can honour the memories of our fallen patriots is through hard work to build a stronger Namibia. In honour of those who did not live to see the dawn of independence and taste the fruits of freedom, we must endeavour to make Namibia a better place, guided by the principles of social justice, democracy, respect for human rights and the improvement of the standards of living of all our people. *This is what our heroes and heroines died for! It is what we, as a nation, must live for!*

As Namibians, we have a duty to work for the betterment of our society. We have a duty to participate in the developmental efforts that can take our country towards the achievements of our short, medium and long term goals. Our Government has introduced workable programmes that are aimed at accelerating the socio-economic transformation of our society. We have put in place the Regional Master Plans, the National Development Plans, Vision 2030, and other policy initiatives.

We have engaged all stakeholders in our society in the drafting and finalization of these policies. The aim is to ensure that, our people fully understand and take ownership of these efforts so that they can participate in their implementation effectively. It is for this reason that Government has translated Vision 2030 into the various indigenous languages spoken by our people. I have brought with me some copies of this document which are written in Oshindonga and Oshikwanyama. The aim of Vision 2030 is to accelerate the socio economic development of our country through industrialisation.

In order to achieve our objectives, we must intensify our development efforts on different fronts. We must continue with greater speed to bring public amenities such as portable water, housing, electricity and market access to all parts of the country, especially to our rural areas. We must encourage and provide the necessary support through agricultural extension services so that our people can produce more food to feed their families and also surpluses for sale to the market.

Our Government has already started to construct silos or storage facilities which will serve as markets for our communal farmers to be able to sell their grains and thereby feed our nation. Such facilities have already been completed at Rundu, in Kavango Region. Plans are underway to construct similar facilities in Oshikoto, Oshana, Omusati, Caprivi and Ohangwena Regions.

With regard to the provision of portable water, our Government has constructed several pipelines to bring water to our communities. In other areas which have not yet been reached by the water pipeline network, boreholes have been drilled. Here in Eengodi constituency more than 40 boreholes have been drilled.

Moreover, our Government is continuing with the implementation of fish farming or aquaculture projects which can help to raise the income levels of participating communities and improve their standard of living.

Last year, we witnessed the completion of Phase One of the Northern Railway Extension Project, which extended our rail network from Tsumeb to Ondangwa. Phase Two of this national endeavour has already started and we look forward to the day when our rail network reaches Oshikango and links with that of our neighbour Angola.

Other development projects to expand physical and transport infrastructure are ongoing in different parts of Namibia. This is what we mean when we say that, we have taken charge of our own destiny. We are implementing these development projects because that is what our fallen patriots fought and died for. By developing our country we are continuing the fight which our heroes and heroines waged with dedication and bravery.

Fellow Namibians,

The tragic events that took place at Cassinga twenty-nine years ago are still fresh in our memories. Many of our compatriots who witnessed and survived that brutal assault are still with us today. They are living witnesses, whose lives have been traumatized by the events of that fateful day. We are saying to them, you are in our thoughts as we recall once again the atrocities and the violence committed against your comrades who were killed in cold blood by the forces of apartheid colonialism. Indeed, you witnessed a tragic and difficult chapter in the history of Namibia's struggle for national independence.

With these thoughts in minds, I would like to call upon all citizens of our country to rededicate themselves to the development of our country, to ensure that we stay on the path of peace and stability and to remain steadfast in our endeavours to make Namibia a better place.

We should not deviate from the path that we have chosen because if we do, we will betray the ideals and values that our heroes and heroines fought relentlessly for. These are the ideals of freedom, justice, equality and democracy in our country.

As Namibians, we should all embrace our policy of National Reconciliation and together build a truly united country, a prosperous Namibia where the present and future generations of our country will enjoy human dignity, equality and freedom irrespective of their colour, religion, race or status in the society.

Long live the spirit of our Revolution!
Long live the Heroes and Heroines of Namibia!
Long live the Republic of Namibia!

I thank you.