

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY
HIFIKEPUNYE POHAMBWA, PRESIDENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA
ON THE OCCASION OF THE
FIRST CABINET SESSION, 2007**

23 JANUARY 2007

WINDHOEK

Check against delivery

Honourable Deputy Prime Minister
Honourable Ministers
Secretary to Cabinet
Members of the Media
Ladies and Gentlemen

On the occasion of the first Cabinet session for the year 2007, I am privileged to wish you all, a very happy and prosperous new year. I am confident that you have returned with new ideas and renewed zeal to face and overcome the challenges facing our nation in the new year.

The first Cabinet session of the year 2007 follows on the heels of the Cabinet Review Meeting which was held at the end of last year. During that Review Meeting, we discussed several issues of national importance, among them, capacity building and human resources development, economic growth and intra-government co-ordination. We agreed that the Government has to redouble its efforts in expanding training opportunities and enlarging the pool of experts and professionals who can implement government programmes and take our country to greater heights.

We also discussed financial constraints facing our Government and agreed that Government Offices, Ministries and Agencies should continuously review their priorities and pursue those policies that will have the most tangible impact on the lives of Namibians.

We specifically underscored the need to allocate resources to the Green Scheme, the rapidly growing tourism sector, the expansion of feeder roads in our rural areas, the construction of grain storage facilities as well as the establishment of more skills training and skills upgrading centres for our youth across the country.

Another critical area of discussion, during the Review Meeting included the need for better co-ordination of government activities. Here again, I wish to urge all Members of Cabinet to promote the culture of co-ordination both within their respective institutions and among the various public sector agencies. Co-ordination should extend beyond central government to incorporate other stakeholders, including regional and local authorities, traditional and community leaders, civil society and the private sector.

At the core of our response to all these challenges is the struggle against poverty and underdevelopment. This calls for the need to promote economic growth and boost its ability to create jobs for our jobless citizens, especially for our youth and women. In that manner, we can move our country forward, eradicating poverty and underdevelopment.

Our aim should be, to achieve tangible results with regard to the improvement of the quality of life of all our people. In this noble task we MUST be driven by a clear understanding of the developmental needs of our country in line with the mandate given to us by our nation as reflected in the 2004 SWAPO Party Election Manifesto and our national development plans and programmes. In this regard, it is imperative that the relevant institutions should work hard to finalise the Third National Development Plan (NDP3).

As we all know, there can be no sustainable development in the country without peace and stability. We must, therefore, as the ruling Party, consciously and continuously invest in peace as well as in political and socio-economic stability. As I have stated in the past, I am convinced that Namibians can live in peace and harmony, because our common values and goals exceed our differences.

I recall the sad events of November last year at Aminuis in the Omaheke region during which a young Namibian was shot and killed at Onderombapa in the Aminuis constituency after two traditional authorities clashed over the swearing-in of a senior counsellor. I want to caution those involved in these acts of violence and intolerance that the Government will not allow mob rule within the borders of Namibia. Those who are responsible must answer for their actions through our justice system. We should not allow seeds of discord and division to undermine the unity of our people.

Our strength, as a nation, lies in the colourful diversity of the Namibian people and in our different cultures, traditions, backgrounds, skills, and knowledge.

Honourable Deputy Prime Minister
Honourable Members of Cabinet,

Our Government's fiscal policy objective is to ensure prudent fiscal management with emphasis on the allocation of resources to our identified priority areas.

This calls for prudence, at all levels, and the avoidance of all forms of wasteful expenditure, duplication and the practice of strict external borrowing.

Our goals, therefore, should encompass the following principles:

- a) Maintain an optimal level of fiscal discipline;
- b) Ensure that allocated resources meet national development objectives;
and
- c) Enhance efficient public service delivery to all our citizens, especially those in rural areas.

In addition, the Government must strengthen its efforts in promoting economic growth and development by allocating financial resources towards employment creation.

We must adopt pro-growth measures by attracting private sector investments and implementing practical interventions to reverse the impact of social crises, such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic, corruption and crime.

The HIV pandemic, corruption and crime have the potential to derail our collective achievements of the past years. More specifically, we must find practical answers to curb the escalating rates of HIV/AIDS among our youth. I believe that we must encourage and promote the work and partnerships involving community-based organisations and the public and private sectors in the fight against the scourge of HIV/AIDS.

It is imperative, that we recognize the need for smart partnerships by providing issue-based and action-oriented platforms for the citizens, government, private sector, labour, media and political parties to work together in a peaceful environment for the country's success and win-win outcomes.

The education and training of our people is crucial for the future of our country, because the future of any country depends on its people. In this regard, our Government has consistently allocated the largest share of the national budget to the education sector, with the belief that economic growth and social progress highly depend on well-developed human resources.

It is pleasing to note that the Ministry of Education, together with the relevant stakeholders, worked hard in averting the procedural bottlenecks experienced at the start of the school year, in the past years.

This year, although some delays were experienced in a few cases, the process of the placement of learners in schools has gone smoothly, and the academic year has kicked off successfully in all parts of the country. I commend the Honourable Minister and his team on this.

While the enrollment of our school children last week went well, I am, and we should all be concerned, about the disappointing pass rate of below 50 percent among our Grade 10 and Grade 12 learners. This embarrassing statistics must be reversed as from now on. We cannot afford such poor performance. We must act swiftly to arrest this disturbing trend immediately and aim for a pass rate of at least 90 percent in the coming years.

In this regard, I call on the Ministry of Education and all relevant stakeholders in education to come forward with proposals and ideas through which we can reverse this negative trend. We must prepare our children for the workplace in a competitive world, but not for the street corners.

In this context, I call on our Minister of Education to develop an entrepreneurial orientation of Namibian learners at Grade 10 level. From Grades 11 to 12, students should already be able to make career choices and to pursue such choices at tertiary level.

I know that many schools face tremendous resource constraints, particularly those in rural areas. At the same time, I am also aware that there are some rural schools which have achieved commendable pass rates. The question we must now ask and find answers to, is: how do these schools manage to perform well in the face of the constraints that they face?

If a school which is located in a rural community can achieve good pass rates, what prevents others from following suit, particularly when they are operating under similar conditions? We need to find answers to these questions and in so doing, reverse this unacceptable trend. We must act, and we must act now.

I am encouraged by the steps taken to re-integrate pre-primary education into the public education system. In fact, the process of curriculum development for pre-primary education has already started. Preprimary education requires the involvement of not only the Government but the community as a whole. Traditional African wisdom informs us that “*it takes a village to raise a child*”. This is, indeed, most applicable in the case of our pre-primary education.

I wish to urge all stakeholders to contribute towards the successful implementation of the envisaged curriculum for pre-primary education so that all Namibian children can get a-head start and stand ready for schooling when they enter Grade 1. This is of utmost importance because pre-primary education forms the strong foundation upon which our education system can stand, grow and produce the desired outcomes.

Honourable Deputy Prime Minister
Honourable Members of Cabinet,

The Festive Season that just ended resulted in high volumes of traffic on our roads. Sadly, what is meant to be a joyful period has, witnessed immense carnage on our roads. Many lives were unnecessarily lost through road accidents that resulted in unspeakable horror. This year, more than 80 road users lost their lives in road accidents. This heavy toll is indeed regrettable and painful.

We have to find ways of creating greater awareness among our road users. Where are we going wrong? Are we doing enough as public authorities to curb this horrendous road carnage? I believe that there is a need to intensify the roles of the existing agencies such as the Motor Vehicle Accident Fund (MVA), the Roads Authority, the National Road Safety Council and the Namibian Police in addressing this problem.

I, therefore, call on the relevant institutions in the transport and road safety sector to fully support and strengthen measures such as the *Xupifa Eemwenyo* initiative.

I also call upon the Ministry of Works, Transport and Communication and the Ministry of Safety and Security to make a thorough assessment of the available human and technical resources with the view to strengthening the traffic police unit in order to improve road safety in Namibia.

Our traffic control officers must be well-equipped to be able to enforce the law effectively and efficiently.

Equally important is the need to review the existing road transport regulations as well as the fines issued for traffic offences. It appears that the current levels of fines are too lenient and do not serve as a sufficient deterrent for aggressive and negligent drivers on our roads.

In this light, I find it necessary to consider introducing a public fines demerit system where points are allocated to drivers. Depending on the number of offences committed, the driver may lose the privilege of driving on public roads for a specified time. Another related challenge is the issue of driving while under the influence of alcohol. Currently, a drunken driver gets away with an insignificant and non-detering fine. As such, we must revisit our regulations with the aim of strengthening the fines for offenses such as drunken driving and over-speeding.

Moreover, we must ensure that Driving Schools in Namibia are operating within the parameters established by law and that the courses that they offer meet all the necessary requirements.

Our law enforcement agencies should enforce the law without fear or favour, they should not show lenience to those who are caught violating our traffic and transport laws. I wish to appeal to all drivers, cyclists and pedestrians alike, to heed traffic regulations at all times.

Honourable Deputy Prime Minister
Honourable Members of Cabinet,

Civil servants are the backbone of the implementation of government policies. Thus, we must continue to inculcate a sense of belonging and team spirit among our civil servants. We must continually emphasise the fact that public service is about serving the public, who are the tax payers. Effective and dedicated civil servants will enable the Government to provide critical services such as health and education to all our people. Hence, it is crucial that civil servants carry out their responsibilities with dedication and a sense of purpose. Whenever grievances within the ranks of the civil servants are encountered, they must be addressed through dialogue based on trust and partnership.

Confrontation and acrimony between the Government and civil servants can only serve to defeat our common purpose for an efficient and productive public service.

Collectively, we must strive to free Namibia and all her people from the shackles of poverty. For our nation to escape the grip of poverty, leaders and civil servant alike must embrace all our citizens and value their contributions. We need to tap into the enormous reservoir of goodwill among our citizens.

We should be willing to listen to the views of our citizens. In so doing we will establish trust and promote the involvement of our citizens in the process of development. This is what participatory democracy and nation building is all about. Suspicion and distrust must make way for trust and partnership.

Let us approach the New Year with intensified collective resolve to overcome the challenges facing our country. Let us adopt a can-do attitude and put in place dynamic systems and processes that can cope with the ever-changing realities of policy implementation. Moreover, we should move away from centralised decision-making towards greater decentralisation.

Our activities and programmes for the New Year should be based on the broad objectives agreed during the Cabinet Review Meeting held last year. Together, we have the capacity to realise our objectives. We must work hard to build a vibrant economy and make Namibia a winning nation where each and every citizen has the opportunity to realize his or her full potential. Once again, I wish you all a productive new year.

I thank you.