

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY
HIFIKEPUNYE POHAMBA, PRESIDENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA,
ON THE OCCASION OF THE
COMMEMORATION OF HEROES' DAY**

26 AUGUST 2007

**EENHANA,
OHANGWENA REGION**

**Check Against Delivery*

Director of Ceremonies
Your Excellency, Cde Sam Nujoma, Father of the Namibian Nation
Right Honourable Prime Minister
Honourable Deputy Prime Minister
Honourable Speaker of the National Assembly
Honourable Chairperson of the National Council
Your Honour the Chief Justice
Honourable Ministers
Honourable Members of Parliament
Honourable Governor of the Ohangwena Region
Your Worship the Mayor of Eenhana Town
Honourable Leaders of Political Parties
Honourable Governors
Honourable Chairperson of the Council of Traditional Leaders, Tatekulu
Kauluma Elifas Honourable Regional and Local Authority Councillors
Distinguished Members of the Diplomatic Corps
Distinguished Members of the Uniformed Forces
Esteemed Traditional and Church Leaders
Dear Comrades, War Veterans and former PLAN Fighters
Distinguished Invited Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On this solemn occasion of commemorating Heroes Day, I request all of you to rise and observe a minute of silence in honour of our heroes and heroines who sacrificed their lives for the freedom and independence of our motherland. [Pause] I thank you. Please be seated.

The commemoration of Heroes Day this year has a poignant significance. A short while ago, we accorded and witnessed a fitting and dignified reburial of the remains of former PLAN combatants, which were discovered at Eenhana and in the surrounding areas. By according them a descent burial and by building a shrine at the site, we have honoured their contribution to the anti-colonial struggle which was started by our forefathers and mothers.

Director of Ceremonies,

The history of the anti-colonial resistance and the armed liberation struggle in Namibia depicts a history of the bravery and heroism of the sons and daughters of the Land of the Brave.

Our forebearers such as Hendrik Witbooi, Samuel Maharero, Nicodemus Kahimemwa, Mandume ya Ndemufayo, Ipumbu ya Tshilongo, Jacob Marenga, Nehale IyaMpingana and others initiated and spearheaded the anti-colonial resistance against foreign occupation of our Motherland.

They fought heroic battles against the colonial forces that invaded our country with the aim of pillaging our resources, confiscating our land and subjugating and oppressing our people.

The flame of anti-colonial resistance started by our forefathers and mothers inspired younger generations to reclaim their land and fight for nationhood, sovereignty and self-determination.

Under the leadership of SWAPO, the people of Namibia waged the noble struggle for national liberation. Many sons and daughters of the soil were forced to leave their homes and families to go into exile. Some of those who waged the struggle inside Namibia endured hardships such as torture, imprisonment and detention.

Namibians, both at home and in exile, were united in a common goal to achieve freedom and independence and bring an end to the inhuman policies of apartheid, segregation and racial discrimination. Towards this end, the people of Namibia stood in unity and waged the struggle on the political, diplomatic and military fronts.

On the political front, SWAPO, which was recognised internationally as the sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people, mobilized our people in all parts of the country to support the struggle for liberation. On the military front, the brave cadres of PLAN, SWAPO's military wing, engaged the enemy in countless battles.

They scored numerous military victories and thereby sent a clear message to the colonial forces that the people of Namibia would neither compromise nor retreat in their march to reclaim their nationhood and freedom. We pay homage to the sons and daughters of Namibia who sacrificed their precious lives for the liberation of our country. We remember all those who sacrificed their lives and shed their precious blood for the freedom of our Mother Namibia.

On the diplomatic front, SWAPO successfully campaigned for the cause of our freedom. As a result, many countries, organisations and individuals in different parts of the world responded by supporting our noble cause in many ways. We shall remain forever indebted to the progressive forces that supported the people of Namibia, during the hour of our greatest need.

Director of Ceremonies,

The armed struggle for Namibia's freedom and independence was at the centre of our strategy to terminate the foreign occupation of our motherland. We knew that we were fighting a vicious enemy, who had no regard for the laws of warfare, human rights or human dignity. Throughout the armed liberation struggle, the apartheid enemy disregarded all international protocols and conventions regarding the conduct of warfare. To them, the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their protocols regulating the conduct of warfare especially the Third Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War and the Fourth Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in time of War were simply non-existent.

As a result, they committed heinous war crimes against our people, regardless of whether they were armed combatants or civilians, men or women. Our people were murdered, tortured, held in solidarity confinement, injected with poison and others were thrown into the Atlantic Ocean after they had been injected with poisonous chemicals. Those heinous acts of abuse of human rights were carried out among others, by the architect of chemical warfare for the apartheid regime known as Wouter Basson or Dr Death and his cohorts.

Unlike the apartheid regime which disregarded international conventions and protocols, SWAPO and the cadres of PLAN executed the war according to the provisions of international law. Those enemy soldiers who were captured by PLAN combatants were treated humanely. One such case involved an enemy soldier by the name of Johan van der Mecht who was captured at Elundu on 18 February 1987. The discovery of the mass graves here at Eenhana and elsewhere, in which the former PLAN Combatants were buried, further highlights the brutality of the apartheid regime which the people of Namibia fought against for twenty-four years.

Today, we are confronted, once again, by the horrors perpetrated against our people at the hands of the apartheid regime. Many sons and daughters of Namibia, cadres of PLAN are today lying in unmarked graves. It is even more painful to note that some of those who fell in battle were not buried. Their remains are lying in the valleys, forests and hills both inside and outside Namibia. We are, however, consoled by the fact that today we have just carried out a dignified reburial of our heroes and heroines whose remains were discovered in mass graves here at Eenhana and in surrounding villages.

The mass grave unearthed at Eenhana is one of the largest ever discovered. It is for this reason that a decision was taken by our Government to build a shrine here at Eenhana where the remains of these fallen brave sons and daughters of Namibia can be reburied in a descent and dignified manner. Furthermore, a decision was also taken that, if the remains of our heroes and heroines of the liberation struggle are discovered in future, such remains will be reburied at the locality where they are found.

It is a well-known fact that PLAN combatants comprised Namibians from different parts of the country. As such, we believe that the remains we have buried today belong to sons and daughters from different parts of Namibia, who fought under the banner of SWAPO.

For this reason, I believe that the shrine we have built here at Eenhana should be seen as representing the reburial of the remains of our fallen comrades from all parts of Namibia. It is for this reason that the shrine should not be regarded as a regional project. The reason that we have built it here at Eenhana is just a historical fact.

Director of Ceremonies,

This occasion should serve to strengthen our resolve as a nation to continue striving for social justice and the improvement of the standards of living of all our people. This is what our heroes and heroines sacrificed their lives for. We must, therefore, rededicate ourselves to work hard in order to overcome the challenges of under-development, poverty, unemployment and hopelessness.

We must address the welfare of our youth. We must address the high rate of unemployment in our country, especially among our youth and women.

It is a historical fact that the youth have been the backbone of our liberation struggle. Therefore, it can be rightly said that Namibia was liberated mainly through their sweat, their blood and their sacrifices. In this regard, they should continue to inspire and nourish the transformation of our society. They must stand as the force behind all our national development endeavours. Indeed, our nation expects our youth who are full of strength and vitality to contribute to the development of our country.

Today, we pay homage to the heroes and heroines of our struggle for national liberation, those who gave their lives and shed their precious blood for our freedom. Now that freedom and independence have been won, our people must work with the same sense of dedication in order to develop our country.

We must endeavour to create more heroes and heroines whose contributions will be measured in terms of social upliftment of our communities, creation of employment opportunities for our people, improvement of the standards of living of our people and the achievement of our developmental goals and objectives. Today we are facing different enemies. Our enemies are poverty, hunger, disease, ignorance, corruption and underdevelopment.

Director of Ceremonies,

In order to successfully develop our country, we must rededicate ourselves to the values of transparency, honesty and accountability. We must ensure that we manage a public service that is clean and free from the evils of corruption, abuse of public assets and greed. Our government will continue to promote these values among our public servants and the society at large. We will continue to support the efforts of the Anti-Corruption Commission and law enforcement agencies so that they can carry out their mandates successfully.

Corruption is an evil that denies our citizens their legitimate entitlements to resources and quality services such as health, education, clean drinking water and adequate social grant. It must, therefore, be addressed root, stem and branch.

In the same vein, all Namibians must stand together to address both the causes and the effects of crime in our society. I am extremely disturbed to note that recently, Namibia has experienced an increase in crimes perpetrated with aggravating circumstances. In most cases, the victims have been defenceless women and children. The violent attacks, rape, murder and robbery perpetrated against our people must be brought to an end. We can achieve this by standing together and by assisting our law enforcement agencies. On its part, the Government will not leave a stone unturned until perpetrators of these heinous crimes are brought to book. I, therefore, appeal to our citizens to assist the police in apprehending these criminals.

Our people should stand together to confront and reverse the march of the deadly HIV/AIDS pandemic, which is devastating our communities. The National Policy on HIV/AIDS which I launched recently should be used to add momentum to our efforts to fight the pandemic. On our part, the Government will continue to provide anti-retro viral drugs to our infected citizens in all thirteen regions of our country. I, therefore, call upon all stakeholders to work together in order to address this national problem.

Today, our struggle is a struggle for economic emancipation of our people, especially the previously disadvantaged Namibians. It is a fact that the rural poor and the peri-urban dwellers are bearing the brunt of our modern struggle. The destiny of our country is now in our own hands. We as Namibians should direct and manage our own development. We must work harder to implement development projects and programmes that can take our country into the future.

We have already demonstrated that we can, as evidenced by many development projects that have been completed and those that are on-going, including the Northern Railway Extension project. I, therefore, wish to express my gratitude and appreciation to all our citizens who volunteered their labour and continue to participate in the construction of the Northern Railway Extension project which is now approaching the Oshikango Boarder. I am pleased to learn that the project attracted our citizens from all walks of life such as the youth, senior citizens, women, men, workers, peasants, traditional leaders, parliamentarians, regional and local authority councillors, the business community and professionals. Indeed, this project has been a symbol of national unity and racial harmony. To you all I say, once again, thank you very much.

If we are to succeed as a nation in addressing our people's socio-economic needs, we need different kinds of soldiers and weapons to fight our enemies. We need class-rooms, pens and books in our arsenal to fight poverty and under-development. We need hard work, transparency and honesty as our weapons to fight poverty and under-development. This, I believe is the fitting manner in which we can honour the legacy of those whose blood waters our freedom.

I am pleased to note that in our midst, we have former PLAN Veterans who contributed in many ways to the military front of our struggle. It is, therefore, only fitting that we welcome them to this very important event.

Director of Ceremonies,

I wish to take this opportunity, once again, to address the nation on the issue of national importance. An issue related to the national unity of our people. An issue related to the peace and stability of our country. Indeed, it is an issue that has the potential to disrupt peace and stability in our country. I am referring to the sustained and uncalled for attacks by some misguided individuals and organizations aimed at our Founding President and Father of the Namibian Nation, Comrade Dr Sam Nujoma.

Two weeks ago, I addressed the nation about the ill-conceived submission by Mr Phil ya Nangolo to the International Criminal Court, seeking the prosecution of Comrade Nujoma and three other patriotic Namibians. When we look at the nature of the verbal attacks and abuses directed at Comrade Nujoma and the submission to the international criminal court, there is no doubt that this is part of an ongoing ploy to disrupt peace and stability in our country. Those who are attacking and vilifying Comrade Nujoma are engaging in a dangerous game that can take our country down a very slippery slope and plunge Namibia into the dark depths of instability and mistrust.

We have all seen the havoc and ruin that political conflicts have done to other countries here on our continent and elsewhere. It is, therefore, our duty as peace-loving citizens to jealously guard the peace and stability that we enjoy today. Our people should rather use their time, skills and resourcefulness towards activities that can build our country, not those that can destroy it. This is the duty of all patriotic Namibians.

As I stated two weeks ago, the overwhelming majority of Namibians regard Comrade Nujoma as a hero of the Namibian liberation struggle. In this sense those who vilify him are, knowingly or unknowingly, disturbing peace and stability in our country. There is no doubt that as we pay homage to the memory and honour of the fallen heroes and heroines of our revolution, we also remember the heroic deeds and contributions of the outstanding sons and daughters of our soil to the liberation of our motherland from the yoke of apartheid colonialism.

This includes our fellow citizens who are still alive today. There is no doubt that Comrade Nujoma stands out as one of those sons and daughters of our Motherland who dedicated their entire lives to the welfare of our nation. It is, therefore, an insult not only to Namibia and to Comrade Nujoma but also to myself for Mr. Phil ya Nangolo to insinuate that in 1966, Comrade Nujoma came back home alone as an enemy collaborator. I can confirm to our nation once again that Comrade Nujoma and I were detained in the same police cell, as such I was at all material times with Comrade Nujoma until we were deported back to Zambia on the second day of our detention.

It must be made very clear here that the mandate to come back home to challenge the apartheid colonial regime was a decision of the SWAPO leadership. The Namibian people know their true history, and they know that Comrade Nujoma was at the helm of Namibia's modern struggle for freedom and independence from its beginning until the achievement of our nationhood on 21st March 1990. For thirty years, he led our people through thick and thin. For fifteen years he led this proud nation as a free and independent people. He is the father of our policy of national reconciliation. He, therefore deserves the necessary respect.

Director of Ceremonies,

Ours is still a young democracy. It needs to be nurtured so that it can become stronger. Although the tree of democracy has grown deep roots in our soil, we must nurture it further so that our citizens can continue to reap its fruits for many years to come. The peace and stability that we enjoy today is one of the most important assets that are critical for the development of our country. Without peace and stability, we will not be able to achieve our development objectives. Without peace and stability, our National Development Plans and Vision 2030 will remain an unachievable dream.

It is for this reason that all our citizens should work towards the common goal of creating a more stable and peaceful Namibia.

A country where citizens preoccupy themselves with constructive and productive endeavours aimed at nation building and enhancing the policy of National Reconciliation among Namibians. These are the ideals that our heroes and heroines fought and died for. They must be ideals that we as Namibians, should promote and live for!

Director of Ceremonies,

On this solemn occasion of Heroes' Day, I would like to call upon all Namibians to join hands and commit themselves to the promotion of peace and genuine national reconciliation. Today, we are remembering the heroes and heroines of our glorious revolution, we are recalling their acts of gallantry and bravery. Their noble acts will forever serve as a source of strength and inspiration to us, in our task to create a better Namibia.

The task of nation building is difficult and arduous, however, in unity of purpose, we can achieve our common goals and objectives. On this day, we pause and reflect on the difficult journey that the people of Namibia have walked in their march towards nationhood and freedom. We still have a long road ahead of us towards Vision 2030 and the realisation of prosperity for all our citizens. Let us walk this road together as Namibians, bound together by the strong bonds of our policy of National Reconciliation, hard work, mutual respect and civility.

Glory to the Heroes and Heroines of the Namibian Revolution!

Long Live the Republic of Namibia!

I thank you.