

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY
HIFIKEPUNYE POHAMBWA,
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA,
ON THE OCCASION OF THE
32nd ANNIVERSARY OF THE
CASSINGA MASSACRE**

04 MAY 2010

WINDHOEK

**Check Against Delivery*

Director of Ceremonies
Fellow Namibians and Friends
Members of the Media
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before I start with my statement, I would like to request you all to rise and to observe a minute of silence in honour of all our heroes and heroines, who sacrificed their lives and shed their precious blood for the freedom and independence of our Motherland. *[After the Minute of Silence is Observed]* I thank you.

The history of the Namibian People to their long march to freedom spans a period of a century. From 1890 to 1990, the sons and daughters of Namibia crossed many rivers of blood. They experienced genocide and massacres but with unshaken determination, they continued a sacred duty of armed liberation struggle until the dawn of independence on 21 March 1990.

Today, the nation remembers the tragic events of that Thursday, 4th of May 1978, at Cassinga in southern Angola, when hundreds of Namibian patriots lost their lives in a cowardly attack on a civilian installation by the racist army of apartheid South Africa under the instructions of Prime Minister John Vorster. This dastardly act was executed the very next day after the UN Security Council concluded the debate on our country's independence. We commemorate that event in light of the long history of the Namibian people, in their march towards self-determination, freedom and national independence.

At the turn of the 20th Century, Germany colonialists massacred thousands of our people and condemned thousands to concentration camps where they endured untold hardships. Concentration camps also claimed the lives of thousands of innocent men, women and children.

Our forebearers such as Hendrik Witbooi, Samuel Maharero, Nehale lyampingana, Mandume ya Ndemufayo, Iipumbu ya Shilongo and others put up fierce resistance against colonial occupation of our Motherland. They waged heroic battles in which many lives were lost for the sake of our land.

This resistance continued in later years against South African colonialism and their attempts to annex Namibia as a fifth province of that country. It also inspired patriotic Namibians in the 1950s to petition the UN to bring an end to South Africa's occupation of Namibia. This gave birth to the establishment of modern liberation movements to mobilize the Namibian people and rally them behind the just cause to bring an end to the illegal occupation of our country and the exploitation of our people.

The launching of the armed liberation struggle by the cadres of the Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), SWAPO's military wing, on 26 August 1966 at Omugulu gwOombashe, demonstrated our resolve to fight and win our freedom and independence by any means necessary.

The forces of occupation responded through increased repression and brutality against our people. SWAPO members and supporters were arrested and tortured, many disappeared without trace, while others were subjected to long periods of arbitrary detention. This forced many Namibians to leave the country and to pursue the anti-colonial struggle from friendly countries. Namibians who went in exile were hosted in reception centres in friendly countries such as Angola, Zambia, Botswana and others. One such reception centre was located at the town of Cassinga, in the Huila Province in southern Angola.

Tragically, thirty-two years ago on the morning of 4th May 1978, South African troops attacked the Cassinga reception centre, with a cowardly and barbaric aerial attack that was followed up with a ground offensive that left hundreds of innocent civilians dead. Those who were wounded and could not take cover in the surrounding forest, were executed in cold blood by ground troops that arrived at the camp in the aftermath of the aerial bombardment. At the end of it all, more than 800 people, mostly women and children were dead, giving their lives for the liberation of their motherland.

The fallen cadres were buried in a mass grave at the site of the attack, while survivors, some of whom are amongst us here today, were sent for medical treatment and education to friendly countries such as Cuba and the Democratic Republic of Germany (GDR).

Compatriots,

Today, we pay homage to these brave sons and daughters of our soil who gave their lives and shed their precious blood on that fateful day. Their sacrifices must inspire all Namibians who were fortunate and privileged to witness the dawn of independence and indeed the future generations, to build a better Namibia where all our people can realize their fullest potential.

It should inspire us to cherish and promote the noble values of liberty, equality, and non-discrimination. While the Cassinga Massacre exposed the ruthlessness of the enemy to the entire world, it emboldened the SWAPO PARTY to further intensify the liberation struggle at all fronts.

The freedom and independence we enjoy today was made possible by the selfless sacrifices of patriotic Namibians who stood firm in the face of danger and fought with determination. We will never forget their sacrifices and their bravery, for their blood waters our freedom.

The freedom and independence that we enjoy today came at a high price of the precious blood of thousands of Namibians. As we commemorate the Cassinga Massacre, let us also remember all our Comrades who sacrificed their lives and shed their blood at places such as Oshatotwa, Shantuhu, Singalamwe, Oshikuku, Ondeshifiilwa, Oshakati, and indeed at other places inside and outside Namibia where our people sacrificed their lives for the noble cause of national liberation. Let us remember all our fallen compatriots who paid the ultimate price in defense of our Motherland.

May their gallantry inspire us to continue the fight for social justice and to bring an end to all forms of discrimination and inequality in all spheres of our lives. May their sacrifices inspire us to uphold the policy of national reconciliation for the future of our Motherland.

Let us honour the martyrs and survivors of the Cassinga Massacre by rededicating ourselves to nation building, national reconciliation, peace, stability, national unity and to our cause for economic emancipation.

I therefore call upon the Namibian nation to always remember that we can only properly honour our heroes and heroines, including the Cassinga Massacre victims, if we reject the vices of tribalism, regionalism, nepotism, ethnicity, sexism and racism.

In this manner, we will bear historic testimony that their deaths and their blood will forever be honoured by the present and future generations of Namibians.

Long Live the memories of the Martyrs and Survivors of the Cassinga Massacre!

Long Live the Republic of Namibia!

I thank you.