

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY DR. HAGE G. GEINGOB, PRESIDENT OF
THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA, AT THE MEMORIAL SERVICE OF THE LATE
COMRADE THEO BEN GURIRAB
AN OUTSTANDING FREEDOM FIGHTER AND TOP DIPLOMAT**

JULY 20, 2018

PARLIAMENT GARDENS

WINDHOEK

Check against delivery

Directors of this memorial service;
Madam Joan Guriras and the bereaved family;
Comrade Nangolo Mbumba, Vice President of the Republic of Namibia and
Madam Sustjie Mbumba;
The Father of the Namibian Revolution and First President of the Republic
of Namibia, Comrade Dr. Sam Shaafishuna Nujoma;
The Second President of the Republic of Namibia, Comrade Dr.
Hifikepunye Pohamba;
The Right Honourable Dr. Saara Kuugongelwa Amadhila, Prime Minister of
the Republic of Namibia and Mr. Amadhila;
Honourable Speaker of the National Assembly, Prof. Peter Katjavivi and
Madam Jane Katjavivi;

To our distinguished guests from the Republic of Zimbabwe:
Honourable Dr. Jacob Mudenda, Speaker of Parliament;
Honourable Prisca Mupfumira, Minister of Tourism and Hospitality;
Ambassador Chipso Zindonga, Foreign Affairs Director of Protocol;

Honourable Chairperson of the National Council, Margaret Mensah-
Williams;
Your Honour, Chief Justice Peter Shivute;
Honourable Ministers and Deputy Ministers;
Honourable Members of Parliament;
Honourable Governors present;
Secretary General of the SWAPO Party, Comrade Sophia Shaningwa;
Members of the SWAPO Party Political Bureau and Central Committee;
Honourable McHenry Venaani, leader of the official opposition and leaders
of other political parties;
Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps;
Distinguished Service Chiefs;

**Veterans of the Liberation Struggle;
Esteemed Religious, Traditional and Community Leaders;
Fellow mourners;**

The ancient Akan Tribe of West Africa has a saying: "The ladder of death is not climbed by one person." In other words this is a universal ladder, which we all will climb, at a time of God's choosing. Comrade Theo-Ben has climbed this ladder, leaving behind vivid memories of a life well lived, of a struggle well fought, of a race well run.

In the history of mankind, countless individuals have stood up when the world cried out for champions of peace. These peacemakers dedicated their lives to fighting injustice, racism and violent oppression. Often times, they risked their own personal safety, to support fellow human beings and to fight for equality using their unique skills of conflict resolution. Through Comrade Theopold-Benjamin Dururob Gurirab, Namibia is proud to commemorate a deserving son, who will be remembered in history, as an influential peacemaker of his era.

I am privileged to have walked the long journey with my brother Theo-Ben; a journey, which began in 1958, when I arrived at Augustineum College - Okahandja, as a young freshman with a thirst for knowledge and politics. Revolutionary fervor permeated the milieu at the time. Following Ghana's Independence on March 6, 1957, Africa became awash in the optimistic spirit that black people could lead and pursue their own destiny. We were joined at Augustineum by other fiery young cohorts, including Onesmus Akwenye, Linekela Kalenga, Mutumbulwa, Jason Mutumbulwa, Gerson Veii, Ben Amadhila, Peter Emvula, Libertine Amadhila, Immanuel Kamanu Gertze, Hidipo Hamutenya, Joseph Ithana, Moses Garoeb and many others.

It was at Augustineum that the first political seeds were planted in Comrade Theo-Ben Gurirab and many of us. Our first experience and foray against the system of Apartheid oppression began when we organized the food boycott on political grounds, as an act of defiance, leading to our subsequent expulsion. Comrade Theo-Ben and others had six months remaining before they completed their teacher's course, so it was difficult for them to join the boycott, but they still decided to do so on principle and in solidarity.

The students then decided to march to Windhoek as part of the boycott managing to organize a truck for transport. All the ladies were transported in this truck while the men walked all the way from Okahandja to Windhoek. In Windhoek, we were received by Fritz Gariseb, Zed Ngavuire and many others, who took us to a concert where Johannes Andreas 'Warmgat' Mureko performed in a hall in Old Location. Later on, we were all convinced by our parents to return to Augustineum to complete our studies.

In July of 1962, the first UN mission arrived in Namibia, led by Dr. Salvadore Martinez De Alba from Venezuela and Dr. Victorio Carpio from the Philippines. Through them, we learned that there were scholarships available for Namibians to study, since the South Africans had always used the argument that Namibians were not educated and therefore could not run the country. When we received the forms for scholarships, we decided not to apply as it would be difficult to get passports at the time. We therefore decided to leave the country and avail ourselves for the opportunity to study. Comrade Gurirab then left the country with Bamba Uirab from Walvis Bay, in June 1962.

After receiving his UN Fellowship, Comrade Gurirab proceeded to Dar Es Salaam and from there to the United States of America in 1963. He continued his studies at Temple University High School in Philadelphia, where he honed his academic skills, making up for shortcomings in English, Mathematics and Science. This is where we met up later, together with other stalwarts such as Hidipo Hamutenya, Philemon Kanime, Festus Muundjua, Linikela Kalenga and Ewald Kanguatjivi. In June 1964, Comrade Sam Nujoma travelled to Philadelphia, and appointed me as SWAPO Chief Representative to the United Nations and Americas with Comrades Theo-Ben Gurirab and late Hidipo Hamutenya, as deputies, thereby setting off the genesis of the "SWAPO Trio".

Comrade Theo-Ben was a great mind and instead of discussing people or events, he discussed ideas. Over the past several days we have heard many recounts of the life of this Son of Namibia. He has been lauded for his diplomatic acumen, his wit and shrewdness, his aptitude and calculating nature, his patience and ability to direct an argument. All of these speak of a man who had extraordinary cerebral capacity. He had no time for small mindedness. Do not get me wrong, as young men, we also had our fun. But the struggle remained at the forefront of our thoughts, decisions and actions.

Following our appointment by Comrade Nujoma, Comrade Gurirab remained in Philadelphia to continue his studies at Temple University while I moved to New York where the United Nations Headquarters are situated. Our political work commenced in earnest and one of the first activities we undertook was to pay a visit to the Liberian and Ethiopian Embassies. These two nations took the case of Namibia to the International Court of Justice, which committed a travesty of justice by

later throwing out the case based on technicalities in 1966. The rest, as they say, is history.

Once we were all in New York, Comrade Gurirab and the rest of us found ourselves embroiled in the Black Power Movement. America was going through a tumultuous period and blacks were rising up against a wave of racial oppression. This atmosphere, was useful for us as young freedom fighters coming from Southern Africa.

When Comrade Gurirab replaced me as Head of the SWAPO Mission to the United Nations in 1972, his work as diplomat began.

When Comrade Gurirab took over from me, we knew then, that the articulation of the Namibian cause was in good hands. In Comrade Gurirab, we had a man who would argue our case, he was put to the test and pass with flying colours.

Diplomacy is the art of negotiation, used as a skill to manage communications outside the influence of the user. Comrade Gurirab was a shining exemplar of a top diplomat. The manner in which our Comrade communicated the message of SWAPO to the international community following the Cassinga Massacre, was a testament of his tactfulness and skill. Earlier this week, Comrade Pohamba made that point eloquently clear. Comrade Gurirab was meticulous in research and hardworking, often staying up until midnight to draft documents. When you look at his legacy, you realize that all the years of blood, sweat and tears payed off, not only for him personally, but for Namibia as a whole.

For all great people, there comes a pivotal moment in one's life that defines a person. That moment sets you apart from others in your

profession and cements your legacy as a champion. For Comrade Gurirab, that moment came during the negotiations of Resolution 435. His negotiation skills during that difficult process elevated him to the category of a Diplomat par excellence. Together with Comrade Nujoma, the late Hidipo Hamutenya, the late Aaron Shihepo, Dr. Ngarikituke Tjiriange and other technical staff, Comrade Gurirab squared off against seasoned diplomats, reputable scholars and lawyers from the Western Contact Group of Five.

After the collapse of the Portuguese empire, the West feared that these newly independent countries would fall in “communist” hands. To prevent what they perceived to have happened in the Portuguese colonies of Angola and Mozambique, when they “fell to communists”, the Western Five (Canada, France, Federal Republic of Germany, United Kingdom and United States of America), wanted to protect the interests of minority settler whites, most specifically, their property.

It should be noted here that in our Constitution, there is scant mention of land.

There is one reference in relation to traditional leaders advising the President on land. Land is covered under property rights in Chapter 3. I am saying this in light of the Land conference we will hold in October 2018. In his style, our fallen extraordinary diplomat, Theo-Ben would want us to deal with this vexing question with patience, tolerance, and focus on sustainable solutions. We owe it to him.

Comrade Gurirab’s journey has taken him to many countries of the world. Over the past week we heard about Abuti Ben, Uncle Ben, Comrade Ben, consummate diplomat, skillful and eloquent negotiator. However, there is

more to a man than his career and profession. Let us not forget Theo-Ben, husband, father, grandfather, uncle and brother.

Sister Joan, I know how you met a long time ago. In fact you know Ben better than most of us, including those from Usakos. You shared beautiful moments. But as the wife of man of the struggle, you endured many lonely moments, your beloved husband away from home during extended periods. Thank you for taking care of our outstanding comrade, father and uncle. Even while he was working hard, he never forgot his children. Dantagob, you spoke fondly about your father. I recall seeing you for the first time during one of his travels. Hanganee, you are named after a revolutionary. Veronica, in Namibia, you are at home. This is your country. It is in your blood.

Sister Joan, and the entire family, our recollection of Comrade Theo-Ben's tremendous achievements, accolades and awards are not enough comfort. Veronica, Matabas, Dantagob and Hanganee, you are children of a giant of our struggle for liberation, and an extraordinary diplomat. Your extended family, Namibians, Africans and the international community served by Ben, stands with you. May God give you strength.

Let me quote an excerpt from the poem Gods Garden by Melissa Shreve: "God looked around his garden and found an empty place. He then looked down upon the earth, and he saw your tired face. He put his arms around you. And lifted you to rest. God's garden must be beautiful, He always takes the best.

Comrade Theo-Ben, you have fought the good fight and have finished the race. God has seen your tired face and put his arms around you to lift you

to rest. His garden is even more beautiful today because he has taken one of our best.

May the soul of Comrade Theo-Ben Gurirab, rest in eternal peace.