

**REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA**



**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR. HAGE G. GEINGOB, PRESIDENT OF  
THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA, ON THE OCCASION OF THE COMMEMORATION OF  
WORKERS DAY**

**MAY 1, 2019**

**KATUTURA YOUTH COMPLEX, WINDHOEK**

**KHOMAS REGION**

Check against delivery

**Directors of proceedings;**

**Comrade Laura McLeod-Katjirua, Governor of the Khomas Region;**

**Comrade Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, Deputy-Prime Minister and Minister of International Relations and Cooperation and Vice-President of the SWAPO Party;**

**Comrade Sophia Shaningwa; Secretary General of the SWAPO Party;**

**Comrade Albert Liswaniso, President of the National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW);**

**All Ministers and Deputy Ministers present;**

**Comrade Jacob Muniaro, Secretary General of the National Union of NUNW;**

**All members of the NUNW Central Executive Committee;**

**Members of the SWAPO Party Politburo and Central Committee;**

**Members of respective SWAPO Party wings;**

**All Governors Present;**

**Distinguished captains of industry;**

**Members of the media;**

**Comrades and friends;**

**I bring greetings to the brave workers of Namibia, I bring greetings to the committed men and women of this country, whose hard work and sweat provides the backbone of our economy. Your ingenuity, commitment and sacrifice sustains our social order, our integrity and our sense of nationhood.**

**I am therefore pleased to join you; our Namibian workers, here at the Katutura Youth Complex and across Namibia, as we join in solidarity with workers across the world, to commemorate Workers Day.**

**Workers Day is no ordinary day. It is not a holiday for people to revel in the pursuit of leisure. Workers Day is a day which each of us should view, with greater significance.**

**Since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, the working man and woman have struggled for better conditions. These are men and women, who toil to put food on the table, most often at a high personal and familial cost. They spend long hours at work, expend excessive amounts of energy, with little or no leisure time to spend with family and friends. All of these sacrifices ensure that the routine of modern life can continue uninterrupted.**

**This is why this day needs to be celebrated with a sense of gratitude and appreciation. We must thank our workers, who are the bedrock of our society. So, I say, thank you Namibian workers, for your hard work. Thank you for patriotism. Thank you for your sacrifice!!**

**The Namibian workers have always been committed to ending injustice and tyranny. In his address to the Central Committee of the Communist League in 1850, Karl Marx postulated that, "It will be the workers, with their courage, resolution and self-sacrifice, who will be chiefly responsible for achieving victory". This has proven true, in the case of Namibia as our struggle for liberation began with the courage, resoluteness and self-sacrifice of our workers.**

**The Contract Labour System, a brainchild of the wicked Apartheid regime, represents one of the darkest moments in the history of the Namibian workers.**

**The inhumanity and callousness of this system has left a long-lasting scar on the fabric of Namibian society. At a time when trade unions were created exclusively for whites, brave Namibian workers began organizing the first labour movement for black people by forming the Ovamboland People's Congress (OPC) in Cape Town, 1957, renamed the Ovamboland People's Organisation (OPO) in 1958, in order to abolish contract-labour.**

**Through these brave steps, the seed for a nationwide movement was planted, not only to abolish contract-labour, but to liberate all Namibians. This culminated in the transformation of OPO to the South-West Africa People's Organisation**

**(SWAPO) in 1960, beginning the long and bitter road towards our national independence.**

**Today, we live in a free and independent Namibia, thanks, in part, to the significant role played by our brave workers, who stood up in the face of brutality and said, "No more!" Although independence brings with it a sense of pride, identity and freedom, it also brings with it its own unique challenges from the socio-economic point of view. There is no doubt that over the past several years, we have made progress, in multiple sectors.**

**However, just as the contract-labour system has left a scar on our society, so did the structural imbalances of the past also leave scars. To deny this fact is to shun the truth and a clear demonstration of blatant ignorance.**

**Historical structural imbalances mean that inequality remains high in Namibia. I would therefore like to repeat again as I said in my State of the Nation Address - Wealth redistribution is non-negotiable! All Namibians must embrace the culture of sharing and if they are unable to do so, they must be taught to do so.**

**In the words of Karl Marx, "If we have chosen the position in life in which we can most of all work for mankind, no burdens can bow us down, because they are sacrifices for the benefit of all...."**

**The problems of income inequality, corruption and poverty in Namibia will not be solved by Government alone, nor by the Private Sector alone, nor for that matter by international friends of Namibia. These problems will be solved only by Namibians! Once we put aside the pursuit of self-interest and choose a position in life in which we can work for all Namibians, no burdens will bow us down, because they are sacrifices for the benefit of all. This Workers Day, let all Namibians follow the example of our workers and sacrifice for the benefit of all!**

**As Government, we will intensify our efforts to finalize the Namibia Equitable Economic Empowerment Framework (NEEEF) and I call on all stakeholders involved to handle this as a matter of urgency. During my 2018 SONA, I stated that employee share schemes are one of the most effective forms of broad-based empowerment.**

**In this regard, I express my appreciation for those Private Sector organisations that have heeded Government's call for economic empowerment through Employee Share Schemes. You have embraced the Harambee spirit and decided to become part of the solution and not simply complain about the problems.**

**Namibian workers,**

**Namibia, being a member of the international community, cannot escape the overbearing influence of geo-politics and resultant global economic uncertainties. We are living at a time when the world is facing various forms of economic crises and these have a direct impact on our economy and subsequently, the job market. Threats of workforce reduction by many multinational companies and foreign investors have increased the anxiety among our workforce. We understand this and that is why we believe in regular tripartite dialogue between Government, Unions and Employers.**

**I am aware that there is a school of thought among some patriots that foreign investment is bad; that it hinders the growth of local enterprises, that foreign investors are only interested in resources and that Namibia derives minimal benefit from Foreign Direct Investment.**

**I wish to state that given our developmental aspirations, large inflows of foreign investments are a prerequisite for a sustainable high trajectory of economic growth. For the Namibian economy to sustain positive economic growth, we need Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to stimulate such growth. Our economy is simply too small to expect that local enterprises will carry the entire burden.**

**The problem is that some, if not all foreign investors come on their own terms. We must see to it that all foreign investors who come here must come on our terms. Therefore, our desire for FDI should not be interpreted as a sign of desperation. Namibia is a sovereign nation and Namibians have endured immeasurable suffering to achieve their freedom.**

**Thus, it is incumbent on all foreign investors in Namibia to respect the dignity and integrity of the citizens of this country, most specifically our workers. As I have mentioned, our workers are characterized by a legacy of struggle that overcame inhumane and insensitive treatment at the hands of oppressors. Therefore, we can never allow our working men and women to be subjected to any cruelty and brutality at the hand of their employers, both local and foreign.**

**It is for this reason that I call on all business owners, investors and employers to treat workers with the utmost respect and dignity or face the full might of the law.**

**Namibian workers,**

**This year marks the centenary celebration of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) under the theme, The Future of Work. The global discourse is focused on the fact that work and the working environment are undergoing a major process of change, mainly due to technology, in the form of the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution resulting in 3D printing, the Internet of Things, Big Data Analysis, robotics, cloud computing, and competition between human beings and machines to name but a few.**

**Namibia and Africa as a whole, cannot afford to be left behind in this technological evolution. This new reality, which we cannot avoid, means that considerable investments must be made to support education and skills development that will swiftly and adequately respond to new developments. As a top priority, the edu-**

**cation curricula in our region needs considerable reorientation to better respond to emerging and future labour market needs. It is only in this way, that the labour market can play its stabilizing role as a source of income and livelihoods for the majority. Furthermore, there is a need of retooling, across the entire labour force spectrum, if we are to ensure that our workers are to benefit from 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution and not become victims of it.**

**During the launch of the ILO Global Commission on the Future of Work Report in Durban, on March 1 this year, Director General Guy Ryder, stressed that due to the onset of mechanization in the form of robots, it is becoming increasingly important to retool or retrain displaced workers or those at risk of being displaced. The competition between man and machine is real.**

**Robots do not get sick, they do not demand high wages and they do not go on strike; therefore, we are seeing robotics and automated system beginning to dominate specific workspaces, especially in the factories. Although we are currently on the cusp of one of the greatest leaps in human technological advancement, one thing remains constant; no economy in the world can survive without the human element that comes in the form of our working women and men. Therefore, let us not fear the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution. Rather let us embrace it by preparing our workers to remain at the forefront of innovation.**

**As I conclude, I wish to pay tribute to our workers and salute these dedicated sons and daughters of Namibia and their peers across the world for their hard work, sacrifice and sense of duty.**

**We salute the Namibian workers for their contribution to our liberation struggle and their continued contribution to our second phase of the struggle. We salute the Namibian workers for their fortitude and unwavering sense of solidarity. Workers of Namibia unite, workers of Africa unite, and workers of the World unite. Unite for better wages, unite against unfair dismissals, unite for improved workplace safety and unite for economic emancipation.**

**Happy May Day celebrations!**

**I thank you.**