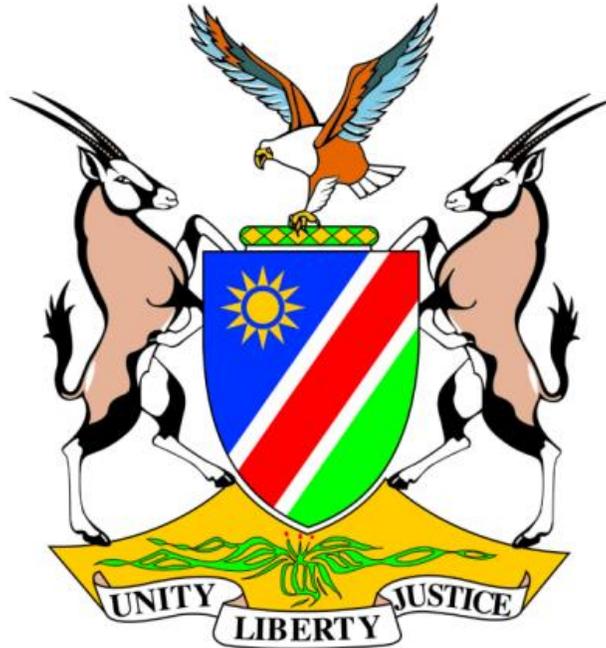


REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



**Keynote Address by His Excellency
Dr. Hage G. Geingob, President of the
Republic of Namibia, at the Launch of the Food Bank**

Fidel Castro Ruz Primary School

June 30, 2016

Check against delivery

Director of Ceremonies;

Comrade Nickey Iyambo, Vice President of the Republic of Namibia;

The Right Honourable Saara Kuugongelwa – Amadhila, Prime Minister of the Republic of Namibia;

Bishop Emeritus Zephania Kameeta, Honourable Minister of Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare;

All other Ministers and Deputy Ministers present;

Honourable Laura McLeod-Katjirua, Governor of the Khomas Region;

All other Regional Governors present;

Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Captains of Industry;

Distinguished invited guests;

Members of the media;

Ladies and gentlemen.

It is my distinct honor and privilege to be here today, in order to officiate at this momentous occasion. This is a culmination of a dream - a dream that has become a reality due to the determination of our Government.

I would like to quote that great man Commandante Fidel Castro who said, "*Men do not shape destiny. Destiny produces the man for the hour.*" It is destiny that has brought us us here today. A shared destiny, aimed at fighting the scourge of poverty and driving Namibia towards prosperity. It is a destiny that has produced men and women for the hour. We can say with absolute certainty that because of these men and women, present here today, we have delivered on yet another promise. It is another step forward, another conquest of a frontier in the war against poverty.

Many of you will recall that on the day of my inauguration as the third President of the Republic of Namibia, before I had officially set foot in office, I announced to the world that Namibia was declaring all-out war on poverty.

As with any war, one must first train soldiers in order to prepare them for combat. A very important aspect of that preparation involves the building of unity, teamwork and morale building. One's psyche must be primed for achieving victory in war. As Sun Tzu said, "*Victorious warriors win first and*

then go to war, while defeated warriors go to war first and then seek to win.

We have prepared ourselves to become victorious warriors in our war, by establishing our own narrative, spurred on by sayings such as, “*One Namibia, One Nation*”, “*No Namibian must feel left out*” and “*Harambee*”. I can confidently state that this narrative and the verbalization of these clarion calls have ingrained themselves within the Namibian psyche and our people have internalized this call to arms. This is evident when one speaks to people from churches, to the people from financial institutions, to farmers, to the man and woman in the street. There can be no doubt that the spirit of *Harambee* is well and truly entrenched and as soldiers, we are all on the same wavelength and well-armed.

One cannot have a successful war without establishing a command centre. A command centre is where targets are identified, strategies are formulated and from where the progress of the war on all fronts will be monitored and resources distributed and shifted to aid the overall war effort.

It is for this reason that upon the declaration of war on poverty, we established the Ministry of Poverty Eradication and Social Warfare as our command centre for our war effort. Poverty is a multifarious phenomenon, and therefore requires a multi-dimensional approach and a multi-sectoral

contribution by all the sectors. The Ministry will be at the centre of our poverty eradication programmes, carrying out its mandate to plan, initiate and coordinate all aspects relating to poverty eradication.

We have already fired the first shots in this war by increasing the old age pension from N\$ 600 to N\$ 1000, which will be followed by an annual increase of N\$ 100. This step was initiated, taking into account the psychological impact of this increase, including the fact that in developing countries, old age pensions play an important role in supporting and improving the lives of older people and by so doing reducing poverty. This step is already bearing fruit. For the upcoming month of July, 160 753 Namibians will receive the Old Age pension payout totaling N\$ 176, 828, 300 and 36, 187 Namibians will receive the disability payout, totaling N\$ 39,805,700.

Following the issue of Old Age pension, we identified another aspect of poverty where urgent intervention was required. This was urban poverty and subsequent food hunger that is so pervasive in the “Katuturas” of Namibia.

As fate would have it, one Sunday afternoon, I was able to witness the devastation of this poverty and hunger first hand. After Church service, I offered a lift to the daughter of the late Comrade Maxuilili and on our way to

her home, we came across some youths in the streets and I could see that they were seething with anger.

While witnessing the conditions that our people are living in, I recalled the Cuban concept of street committees. Although these committees play a specific role in Cuba, that of the defense of the revolution, I realized that the concept behind these committees and how if implemented properly, could help instill discipline in the angry youth and be a source of purpose and pride for them as they would be placed in charge of various streets. They will also be able to play an integral role in the distribution of food and the upkeep of the communities in which they reside.

As a former teacher, I recall that naughty children were usually made prefects in order to instill a sense of responsibility and discipline within them. The same concept could be applied to the angry youths of our "Katuturas". A modified version of the Basic Income Grant could then be applied as the youths will be paid for their efforts while people will receive food.

This epiphany, which I experienced, is what led to the genesis of our own Food Bank concept and during my Visit to Cuba last year; I approached President Raúl Castro to ask whether he could accord us one of his trusted cadres to assist us in implementing the Food Bank concept modelled on the

Cuban street committees. As was expected from our longstanding comrades, they sent us Comrade Angel Dalmau Fernandez, who is present here today.

Comrade Dalmau, has wasted no time in starting the process of identifying and training youths in order to prime them so that they are ready to assist the efforts of this concept. To date, the number of street committee members trained under his excellent stewardship is 117. Of these, 64 are from Tobias Hainyeko Constituency and 53 are from Samora Machel Constituency. Today, you will be able to witness these youths in action, as they assist in the food distribution process.

As Government, our aim is to establish food banks in urban and peri-urban areas. The food bank initiative will involve a process of sourcing food and required non-food items and distributing these items to poor and vulnerable persons, making use of the street committees. This concept is merely based on the Cuban model but due to the fact that many of our local target areas don't have streets per se, our committees will operate differently.

The street committees have been selected from amongst the communities, giving consideration to the unemployed youth, with the main purpose to undertake identification of vulnerable persons and to conduct the registration of the beneficiaries as well as, most importantly, assisting with the facilitation of the distribution of food. Furthermore, the street committee

members will also be engaged in providing social services in communities. This will include ensuring that children in the communities attend school, amongst other things.

Government has targeted households whose per capita income is below N\$ 400 as those who will qualify for benefits under the food bank. However, I would like to caution that this criterion will be used in the pilot programme and is not a criterion set in stone. It is expected that 5,816 households with a total of 27,500 will benefit from the food bank in Tobias Hainyeko Constituency during this pilot period.

The Ministry of Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare will commence with the distribution of food parcels, immediately following today's launch and Yours Truly will be there as well. The distribution will be done on a monthly basis, per location.

Today's launch signifies the start of the food bank operation, starting in the Tobias Hainyeko Constituency of the Khomas Region. I am told that the identification of beneficiaries has already commenced in the Samora Machel Constituency, where the distribution will start by the beginning of August 2016. The pilot exercise will be extended to other constituencies in the Khomas Region, and I am reliably informed that all will be covered by December of this year.

To our citizens from other regions, do not despair. You have not been left out. This is a fine tuning process, therefore we want to get things right before we come to you. In every war, you must win your small battles first before you progress to more complex battles.

There are some who may seize this opportunity not to celebrate this breakthrough moment, but rather to express their habitual criticism of Governments developmental efforts. Many of these people never wanted us to arrive at this moment, but unfortunately for them, the spirit of Harambee is stronger than the spirit of division. Let me point out the following.

Initially, we had grandiose ideas of constructing warehouses with state of the art cool rooms and abattoirs. However, following a number of conflicting quotes received from prospective constructors, and given the exorbitant costs quoted, after some soul searching, we realized that this would be a contradiction to our efforts of fighting poverty. It would be preposterous if Government were to build a facility which costs close to N\$ 100 million while our people are going to bed on empty stomachs.

There are those that will question the sustainability of food handouts and say that it will create a dependency syndrome. To those people I would like to say that they should understand that the Food Bank concept is part of an

integrated Poverty Eradication Framework, which includes a Graduation Model. The intent is to ultimately break the poverty cycle and not create dependency.

Our efforts will involve applying different approaches in different regions. Some approaches will involve integration with drought relief activities which will involve the utilization of existing drought relief facilities such as warehouses from where food will be distributed. Furthermore, we will endeavor to drastically improve sanitation in all regions since it is our poorest indicator on various competitive indices such as the World Economic Forum Competitiveness Index.

Efforts to improve nationwide sanitation will involve the installation of waterless toilets in all 14 regions. Our aim is to completely eliminate the need for our people to relieve themselves in the bush. Where applicable, we also plan to provide plowing and tractor services to subsistence farmers in the North, North-East, Kunene Region and in the South as well as all areas where subsistence farming take place. We will ensure that no region is left out.

Today is added proof that as a country, we are on the march in the right direction towards prosperity. At this juncture, I would like to acknowledge the efforts of our local commercial and game farming community, our

manufacturers, our retailers, and our churches who have firmly pledged to assist the food bank concept. This patriotic display by Namibians from all corners of the country is indicative of a firm belief in a brighter future for all Namibians.

Let me also acknowledge the United Nations and our diplomatic community for having pledged support for our food bank concept, as well as the war on poverty as a whole. We appreciate and thank you for the continuation of your solidarity with the people of Namibia.

While there are those wishing to see Government fail, there are those patriotic Namibians and members of the international community who are committed to the success of our country. I would like to quote from a recent article by Dr. Joseph Stiglitz and Professor Anya Schiffrin, titled *Learning from Namibia*, which says, “*Namibia shows that even countries that start with serious disadvantages – extremes of racism, colonialism, inequality, and underdevelopment – can chart a path toward shared prosperity. Its achievement deserves international recognition – and emulation.*” If a noble laureate in economics and a renowned professor can deliver such a positive verdict on our country then why should we pay attention to the naysayers who are intent on delivering their own distorted indictments against our Government?

We are moving in the right direction and better days lie ahead. By pledging support to our efforts, you have all exhibited the power of the Harambee spirit. It has been said that, if one person suffers, then we all suffer. Togetherness is strength in courage. If one Namibian is suffering from poverty, our whole nation is suffering. Therefore, let us pull together in one direction, with strength and courage – The strength and courage needed to fight our war against poverty as One Namibia One Nation.

I thank you.