

SPEECH ON THE OCASSION OF THE 3rd SoCATT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SEMINAR – WINDHOEK, NAMIBIA – 2 – 4 JULY 2018

BY: ADV. ERIC PHINDELA

Madam Chairperson of the National Council

Speaker of the National Assembly (in absentia)

Members of the Executive Committee of CPA Namibia Branch

Honourable Members

Members of the SoCATT Steering Committee

Secretary of the National Assembly, National Council of the Parliament of Namibia
whom we are thankful and indebted to you for hosting us.

Secretaries and Clerks of all Parliaments, Provincial Legislatures, State Legislatures,
and Counties

Our guests who have made time to be with us today, colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen

A source of intense pleasure it is to me to address this 3rd Professional Development Seminar of the Society of Clerk Africa Region. Namibia is very close to the heart of the Society of Clerks. It is here in 2013 that we marked the turning point in the operations of the Society of Clerks. It is where we took a decision for the Society of Clerks to have its own source of income for the implementation of its programmes. I am sure Madam Chairperson had it not been for that watershed moment, we could not be here today.

It is with great sense of excitement that I address this Seminar. Excited because we have converged here to do what Nelson Mandela and Sam Nojuma would have and would

appreciate what we have set out to do today and in the day – an attempt at transformation of our parliamentary operations and practices in Africa. This during the centenary of Mandela and Albertina Sisulu. Of course, because of their material conditions Mandela and Nojuma did differently. Whereas Mandela and Nojuma took up arms to transform the society and to better the conditions under which they found themselves, we as the current generation of administrators and Parliamentarians, must do it differently, through technological means. I say this mindful of the cost of data and limited access to technology by the masses of the African people.

Chairperson and Speaker I vividly remember when I was still a student at the University of the Western Cape when I had to bid farewell to the students who were citizens of the then South West Africa who had to come and vote for the establishment of the democratic government of the Republic of Namibia. I vividly remember, when after the elections, I watched on TV as the flag of the democratic Namibia was unfurled and replaced the flag of undemocratic South African. Perhaps if there were other means of technology, I could have captured that moment. Then I had no cellphone, let alone a smart one. There was no you tube to replay over and over again. It is therefore upon us to grab this opportunity and embrace a new way of doing things in the modern world of technology. Africa today, like any other continent in the world, is faced with what is referred to as the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Honourable Chairperson, Speaker, Honourable Members and Colleagues, we must make it our mission to ensure that technology does not enslave us as we seek to fulfil our mission to create modern institutions that truly advance the development of the people of Africa through the use of technology. We must vehemently resist the mentality that some of us were born before the current technological advances. We must strive to use the technology available to advance the operations of our Parliaments and improve the effectiveness and efficiencies of the of administration and Members of Parliament. We must be a generation of members and administrators who tomorrow would say due to the use of technology, we have reached more people than that we could have previously. We

must be proud to say due to technology more people can participate in the law-making processes in our Parliaments. For there is nothing that inhibits us from issuing notices of meetings and public hearings using the technology. As urged by Frantz Fanon, we must fulfil the mission of our generation of truly modernizing our institutions while enhancing democracy through technology. We dare not betray that mission. **(Each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it.)** We must resist the belief that parliamentary operations are by nature conservative, they are governed by certain set of practices and procedures that have crystallized and are therefore difficult to change - that papers can only be laid on the Table by physically doing so in the House. We must negate the conservative view that in order to consult with the people, we must be located within the same physical space. Technology know no bounds. We must fundamentally change the Rules of our Parliaments, our systems and processes to accommodate technological advances. The Rules must make it possible for people to make submissions on matters before Parliaments without travelling long distances.

The Seminar is therefore aptly entitled Capacitating Parliaments towards realizing Agenda 2063: The Role of Parliaments in the age of knowledge based economy. It acknowledges that both Members and administrators are indeed knowledge workers. On a daily basis we generate knowledge through, amongst others, research, legal advice and procedural advice. The weakness however lies in the fact that we do not make it our mission to own and protect this knowledge. It is therefore my hope that we shall emerge from this Seminar with strategies to harvest and store this knowledge so that nobody dare contest the assertion that the we are knowledge based Legislative Sector. And that, the use of technology can truly transform and improve the effectiveness and efficiencies of our institutions.

As administration, we must ensure that Members of Parliament have access to information irrespective of where they are located. Our Chambers must make it possible for Members to freely participate in the debates. We must consider whether it is technologically feasible for members to participate in a debate even though they are situated in different locations. Whether for the purposes of quorum, those members who

so participate, could be considered to be present. Of course ordinary parliamentary practices and procedures may negate that thinking.

I hope that the following words of Frantz Fanon do not ring true in the Legislative Sector

“Sometimes people hold a core belief that is very strong. When they are presented with evidence that works against that belief, the new evidence cannot be accepted. It would create a feeling that is extremely uncomfortable, called cognitive dissonance. And because it is so important to protect the core belief, they will rationalize, ignore and even deny anything that doesn’t fit in with the core belief.”

I hope that when presented with evidence, like those who hold a core belief that is very strong that parliamentary processes, systems and procedures are difficult to change, we do not seek to “rationalize, ignore and even deny anything that doesn’t fit with the core belief that technology is indeed inextricably intertwined with our daily operations.”