



STATEMENT BY

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**SPEAKER OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA**

AT THE

**OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE 5th CHILDREN'S
PARLIAMENT**

Theme:

“Engaging Young people in the Legislative Process”

Monday, 19th AUGUST 2019

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
PARLIAMENT BUILDING
WINDHOEK**

- **Honourable Martin Andjaba, Acting Minister of Education, Arts and Culture,**
- **Honourable Doreen Sioka, Minister of Gender Equality and Child Welfare,**
- **Madam Rachel Odede, UNICEF Country Representative**
- **Honourable Members of the Children’s Parliament**
- **Eminent Invited Guests,**
- **Ms. Lydia Kandetu, Secretary of the National Assembly,**
- **Staff of the National Assembly,**
- **Members of the Media,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I extend a warm welcome to you all and especially, to Members of the 5th Children’s Parliament.

The fundamental aspect of the Children Parliament is the fact that it facilitates children and young people’s participation in the democratic processes of their country. If I may quote Victoria Johnson et.al (1998), published by Intermediate Technology Publications,

“Children and young people have much to offer the community they live in, but are often excluded in decisions and policies that affect their development, as their own opinions are ignored or overruled much of the time.

Participatory approaches used in sustainable development world over, can provide the vehicle needed to include children in the decision-making processes which can affect themselves

and their communities and can have far reaching implications for policies and practice.”

**Hon. Members of the 5th Children’s Parliament,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

As you are all aware, you are privileged to have been accorded the opportunity to represent the rest of the youth in the country, through your schools and regions, as Members of the 5th Children Parliament. It is therefore significant that you understand and appreciate the importance of the Children Parliament. The purpose of the Children Parliament is to inculcate or cultivate a democratic culture amongst our youth as they prepare to become leaders of tomorrow. A democratic culture implies political tolerance. It calls for the need to provide space for different views to be heard, including those views that you may not necessarily agree with, as articulated in Articles 17 and 21 of the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia, on freedom of expression and fundamental human rights. I believe you have been enlightened about this during your induction exercise. Furthermore, key issues discussed here in the Children Parliament are often taken up by the responsible ministries for implementation in addressing challenges in the country.

I therefore wish to simply highlight a few achievements about our previous experience with the Children Parliament. The Fourth Session of the Children’s Parliament was held from **6 – 10th May 2013**. That was a marathon Session because altogether ninety-eight (98) motions were tabled and debated. I

would like to encourage you that recommendations from the Children's Parliament are normally forwarded to the line ministries for consideration.

As a matter of fact, inputs from the Fourth Session of the Children's Parliament led to the inclusion of clauses dealing with the National Advisory Council on Children and the Children's Advocate/Ombudsman in the Child Care and Protection Act. Equally, important policy inputs from the Fourth Session, like the need to give a second chance to young pregnant girls to go back to school after delivery as well as those who fail Grade 10, were incorporated into policy by the line Ministry. In other words, such learners are considered for re-admission, provided the facilities and resources are available to accommodate them.

Some of the former Members of the Children's Parliament went on to become professionally successful. I am sure that they would agree with me that the Children's Parliament played a key role in shaping their leadership and debating skills as well as their integrity and discipline as human beings.

Hon. Members of the 5th Children's Parliament,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Several stakeholders have been instrumental in working with the National Assembly, to ensure that this worthy initiative of the Children Parliament is maintained. In this connection, the National Assembly has a two-year cooperation agreement with UNICEF in terms of which UNICEF has undertaken to assist with the activities of the Children's Parliament. I would

therefore like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank UNICEF for their kind generosity.

I am also aware that besides the preparatory arrangements made by the National Assembly, UNICEF, the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture as well as the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, the Ministry of Works and Transport has also provided two buses for the transportation of Members of the Children Parliament around Windhoek. Equally the Ministry of Health and Social Services has made two nurses available who will be on standby here at Parliament in case of any health-related emergencies.

The media has also played an important role in promoting this event. Here I need to single out our national broadcaster, the NBC, because they have been providing extensive coverage, not only through interviews, but they are also providing live coverage of the proceedings.

I therefore want to sincerely thank all of you who have brought this project to fruition.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Altogether 98 children coming from all the 14 regions of Namibia constitute this 5th Children's' Parliament – meeting under the theme “*Engaging young people in the legislative process.*” In other words, we have 7 children representing each region. The National Assembly and our partner UNICEF only provided the selection guidelines, but the selection process was done from the regions where the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture and the teachers were actively involved and the

criteria also took cognisance of gender representation and disability.

A number of experts representing different institutions made presentations on Saturday and Sunday during your orientation covering various topics which we thought might be of interest to you as Members of the Children's Parliament. We hope you have benefitted from those presentations and those lessons will come in handy during your deliberations.

It is pleasing to note that Mr Edward Ndopu, a Canadian-based young Namibian social activist who is physically challenged and who is also a celebrity in his own right, will engage you on Wednesday in a question and answer session around the issues of Children with Disability. Mr Ndopu is a Member of the UN Advocacy Group on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). He has also served as an advisor to the World Economic Forum, UN Women and Amnesty International. There are also plans to enable him to deliver a televised address from Space to the UN on the importance of the SDGs. Again, we want to thank UNICEF for sponsoring his participation.

Hon. Members of the 5th Children's Parliament,

I am aware that this morning you elected your Speaker and Deputy Speaker to preside over the proceedings of the House. Congratulations to the newly-elected Presiding Officers, I hope you will live up to the expectation.

I understand that you are yet to break into the following Standing Committees: Standing Committee on Education and

Information and Communication Technology; Standing Committee on the Rights of Children and Climate Change; Standing Committee on Health and Social Protection; and the Standing Committee on Gender Equality and Social Welfare. All these processes will give you a feel of what it means to be a Member of Parliament.

Indeed, I am confident that you are going to have your hands full here because the challenges that face the Namibian youth are many. Some of these challenges are as follows:

- Poverty as well as lack of empowerment and emancipation;
- HIV/AIDS;
- Youth unemployment;
- Alcohol and drug abuse;
- High early school dropout rates;
- Gangster-related and other forms of violence;
- Gender-based violence against women and children;
- The challenges posed by absentee fathers; and
- Teenage pregnancies.

These are just but a few of the examples and the list could be endless.

The National Assembly has over the years passed and adopted national laws and international instruments to protect the children and to promote their rights. Some of these legal instruments are as follows:

- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989;
- The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child of 1990;
- The ILO Convention on the Prohibition and Immediate Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour (No.182 of 1999);
- The Child Care and Protection Act (No.3 of 2015);
- The Combating of Rape Act (No.8 of 2000);
- The Combating of Domestic Violence Act (No.4 of 2003)
- The National Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) Policy etc.

Hon. Members of the 5th Children's Parliament,

Since you have been selected to represent all the young people in the country, I implore you not keep this experience to yourselves but to go back and use your experience to create a positive impact in the lives of other young people.

On this note, I would like to encourage you seize the moment and maximize your participation in this life-changing experience!

With those few words, it is now my honour to declare the Fifth Session of the Children's Parliament officially open.

I thank you all!