

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



STATEMENT BY

HIS EXCELLENCY DR HAGE G. GEINGOB,

PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE 9th SESSION OF THE 6TH PARLIAMENT

FEBRUARY 13, 2019

WINDHOEK

Check against delivery

- **Speaker of the National Assembly, Honourable Professor Peter Katjavivi and Madam Katjavivi;**
- **Chairperson of the National Council, Honourable Margaret Mensah – Williams and Mr. Williams;**
- **Prime Minister of the Republic of Namibia and Leader of Government Business in the House, Right Honourable Saara Kuugongelwa–Amadhila;**
- **Leader of the official opposition, Honourable McHenry Venaani;**
- **Honourable Members of Parliament;**
- **Vice President of the Republic of Namibia, Comrade Nangolo Mbumba and Madam Mbumba;**
- **Your Lordship Peter Shivute, Chief Justice;**
- **Your Lordship Petrus Damaseb, Deputy Chief Justice, Hon. Judges and other Members of the Judiciary;**
- **Madam Monica Geingos, First Lady of the Republic of Namibia;**
- **Hon. Laura McLeod-Katjirua, Governor of the Khomas Region;**
- **Your Worship Mr. Muesee Kazapua, Mayor of the City of Windhoek;**
- **Distinguished Service Chiefs;**
- **Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps;**
- **Members of the media;**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen;**

On February 5, 2019, I opened the first Decision-Making Cabinet Meeting of the year, thereby marking the beginning of the work of the Executive for the year 2019. At this meeting I called on all Cabinet members to

strictly adhere to the principles of accountability while spearheading the business of State. On February 6, 2019, I officiated at the opening of the 2019 Legal Year, thereby marking the beginning of the work of the Judiciary for the year 2019. During the opening I stressed the importance of maintaining of public confidence in our judicial system and that this starts by having a judiciary that is free from improper influence from the other branches of government.

Today, we mark the Opening of the 9th Session of the 6th Parliament, and the commencement of the work of Members of Parliament, under the theme, "Promoting Integrity, Accountability and Professionalism". We find ourselves all under one roof, representing all three Organs of State. Although we all have to carry out specific functions, our being together on this day is a symbol of our unity of purpose, our patriotism and our unwavering commitment to developing Namibia into an economically developed and prosperous nation.

Parliament, as the legislative body of state, is the linchpin of our Governance Architecture; carrying out critical functions such as law making, representation of the electorate and oversight of government activities. The execution of these vital functions and the responsibility of representing the electorate, requires that parliamentarians should be paragons of virtue.

Why are concepts such as integrity, accountability and professionalism pivotal to the function, not only of the Legislature, but all three Organs of State? Meredith Edwards, in her paper The Trust Deficit - concepts and causes of low public trust in governments, highlights their importance by stating, "Trust in government has been identified as one of the most important foundations upon which the legitimacy and sustainability of political systems are built. Trust is essential for social cohesion and well-being as it affects governments' ability to govern and enables them to act without having to resort to coercion. Consequently, it is an efficient means of lowering transaction costs in any social, economic and political relationship."

Worryingly, we are living at a time in which there is a trust deficit between the public and governments. The Organisation for Economic Development and Corporation (OECD) indicates that during the last decade, the world has witnessed a growing decline in trust among the general public towards democratic institutions. Issues such as perceived corruption are negatively affecting accountability and political credibility. It is for this reason that I use the formula accountability + transparency = trust.

Our Parliament, as the primary symbol of our democracy, is an essential element in our efforts to combat corruption and to promote integrity. Oversight over the executive structures of government gives parliament the scope and power to introduce measures and laws which will ensure that integrity is the norm, rather than the exception when it comes to the business of government.

As a Government, we have set ourselves high targets that we aim to achieve, in our concerted drive towards a more prosperous Namibia. In addition, we have also declared war on social ills such as poverty and corruption. We understand that none of these goals are achievable in the absence of effective governance and this is why we have made it the first pillar of our Harambee Prosperity Plan, which advocates for the increase of accountability and transparency, as well as the improvement of performance and service delivery.

Integrity, accountability and professionalism are the foundations of effective governance. This in turn, enhances our pursuit of our development objectives, while at the same time, protect us from debilitating behaviours such as corruption. It is crucial that we improve the trust that people have in government and that should begin here, in parliament, where the representatives of the electorate endeavour to fulfil the important function of keeping our democratic institutional systems accountable and transparent.

I have said that the sign of a fully functioning democracy is the existence of robust and well-founded processes, systems and institutions. If parliamentary institutions are mistrusted and perceived to be corrupt, it places

a serious challenge to our democracy and subsequently our ability as government to deliver on our promises to the electorate.

At this juncture I wish to address the issue of decorum and how the way we conduct ourselves in public and in our work spaces can affect public perception of our institutions and government as a whole. Individuals who work in public life should adhere to certain professional and ethical standards. All Parliamentarians should behave according to a strict code of conduct and their attitude and work should be aimed at reflecting the will of the electorate and not their individual will. I am aware that legislators encounter situations every day that place them at the crux of ethical dilemmas and it is due to this reason that Members of Parliament should possess irrefutable professionalism. This being the case, I hope, Comrade Speaker, that this year of accountability, we will no longer witness the lack of quorums in Parliament.

As the representatives of the people, we should always be mindful of the fact that the most valuable asset that we possess is our reputations. Once one's reputation is damaged, one's effectiveness becomes impeded. Subsequently, ineffectiveness of politicians will have adverse consequences on our governance architecture, leading to losses in government revenue, lower quality public investment and public services, reduced private investment and loss of public confidence.

Comrade Speaker, listening to your press briefing several days ago, I am confident that as our Parliamentarians prepare to resume the business of Parliament, we will witness improved integrity, accountability and professionalism from the word go.

I encourage our Parliamentary Committees to carry on from where they left off in 2018, undertaking visits to the regions, investigating government projects and conducting public hearings on pertinent issues such as gender based violence and teenage pregnancies. The work of the Parliamentary Committees plays a vital role in the development of our country. Parliamentary committees give Members of Parliament and the public a chance to play a part in the formation of public policy. They allow Parlia-

ment to scrutinise the Executive more effectively, thereby making the Executive more responsible to the electorate.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am aware that there are 14 bills lined up to be tabled during this year's session of Parliament, these are:

1. Divorce Bill
2. Legal Practitioners Act Amendment Bill
3. Ombudsman Bill
4. Magistrates' Courts Amendment Bill
5. Combating of Rape Amendment Bill
6. Child Justice Bill
7. High Court Amendment Bill (Rule 108 Amendment)
8. Combating of Torture in Persons Bill
9. Electronic Transactions Bill
10. Bank of Namibia Bill
11. Namibia Post and Telecom Holdings Dismantling Bill
12. Control of Importation of Dairy Products and Substitutes Amendment Bill
13. Prevention of Pollution of the Sea by Oil Amendment Bill
14. Maritime Authority Bill

I wish to elaborate on a few of these Bills.

Ombudsman Bill: The Office of the Ombudsman, which is a constitutionally established office, must have much greater independence and enforcement powers in order to properly carry out its human rights functions. The Bill makes provision for this restructuring in terms of the international standards of Ombudsman Offices.

The Combating of Rape Bill: The amendment seeks to make the Act much more victim-centred by placing additional duties on the prosecutor when dealing with bail applications and stating guidelines for service providers who deal with rape complainants. We have witnessed many disturbing instances in our society where individuals arrested for committing rape are released on bail, only to reoffend and cause more physical and mental trauma in our communities.

As the supreme lawmaker, Parliament should introduce laws to help us combat social ills that are hampering socio-economic progress in our country. Furthermore, we should ensure that all unjust laws of the past regimes are replaced with just laws. Our people cannot continue to be subjected to archaic and discriminatory laws anymore.

Electronics Transactions Bill: The Bill aims to promote legal certainty and confidence in electronic transactions and communications; to promote e-government services and electronic commerce and communications with public and private bodies, institutions and citizens; to develop a safe , secure and effective environment for the consumer, business and public agencies or bodies to conduct and use electronic transactions; and to promote the development of electronic transaction services that are responsive to the needs of online consumers.

Maritime Authority Bill: The rationale for the Bill is to create a Maritime Authority, which functions on a user-pay principle, so that it is self-sustaining. This is essential for Namibia to be able to regulate foreign ships entering the harbour under international jurisdictions known as flag states.

Two more Bills, namely the Basic Education Bill and the Public Enterprises Governance Bill, were referred back to the National Assembly by the National Council for reconsideration.

The tabling of these bills during this Session, demands absolute commitment and a high work ethic from legislators, in order to ensure that Par-

liament maintains a high success rate in passing these bills. As a result, I expect lively, informative and serious debates, as you discuss these bills. I call on all Parliamentarians once more, to be punctual and endeavour to attend all sessions of parliament. Let your attendance and punctuality be a source of your pride rather than allowing tardiness and absenteeism to be a source of your shame.

The year of accountability calls upon us to rise to the challenges facing Namibia. It is a defining year. A year in which we either decide to hold hands and pull together to consolidate and build upon our hard earned gains or risk losing the decades of progress we have made since our independence.

I look forward to a year where our Parliament will display integrity in representing the electorate, promote accountability through providing oversight and display undoubted professionalism in the crafting of legislation.

Comrade Speaker, with these words, it is my honour to now declare the Ninth Session of the Sixth Parliament of Namibia open.

I wish you all a year of great success. May God Bless the Republic of Namibia.

I thank you.