



MAIDEN SPEECH BY

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CULTURE**

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WINDHOEK

8th Parliament of the Republic of Namibia

Deputy
**Honourable Speaker, Honourable Members of Parliament,
Fellow Namibians,**

I rise today for the very first time in this August House, not only as a Member of Parliament, but as a proud servant of the Namibian people—entrusted with the responsibility to shape a future worthy of our youth, our creatives, our athletes, our teachers, and our entrepreneurs, in my role as Deputy Minister of Education, Innovation, Youth, Sports, Arts and Culture.

The portfolios under our care are not simply administrative. They are deeply human. They foster the dreams of young people sitting in classrooms. They speak to the hopes and ambitions of young graduates who have been empowered, and continue to knock on closed doors. They speak to the talent and determination of athletes training on dusty sand fields, to the spirit of artists searching for their voice and to the boldness of innovators daring to reimagine our future.

But today, we must begin with **honesty**.

Yesterday I chose to visit Havana and Goreangab informal settlement. I had the opportunity to engage young people where I insisted to see where we are building the next school in Havana as well as the intermediate hospital and police station. I

was briefed by our Honorable Councilor that the 2023 national census confirmed 36,000 dwellings. I struggled to sleep last night, thinking how we can do more, how we must not allow for out of sight out of mind, we need to do more, we must do more and we shall do more.

I Am Because We Are

To introduce myself as a retired youth, I was born in Windhoek Central Hospital to a Namibian mother, Sheryl Panton, and an Italian father, Luigi Ballotti. Raised in the Windhoek East constituency, all I truly know is being Namibian. When asked, *"But where are you from?"* - I answer without pause each time: *Namibia.*

My sons, Omuna and Omujame, are third-generation Namibians. With slightly darker pigmentation, perhaps they will be seen as 'proper' Namibians. Perhaps.

I reflect today on stories told to me by my brother, Sheku Nepembe, about his late father, Tate Tommy Nakalega, a freedom fighter whose blood waters our freedom. These are the giants upon whose shoulders we stand. Because of them, I, a young boy with big dreams, now stand here in this August House in the 8th Parliament.

Inspired by Unity, Driven by Service

Last week, I listened to deeply inspiring maiden speeches by Honourable Members across the room, including that of Inna Hengari, and my comrade brothers George Kambala and Prof Job, two youth league veterans of the SWAPO Party. Each of them reminded me of our sacred promise, as I took the oath to be sworn into the executive branch of Government, and that is to serve with **integrity, honour, and humility**.

I would be remiss not to acknowledge those who have shaped me:

- My parents, for teaching me right from wrong and instilling a sense of kindness.
- My mother, Angela Katjimune, and Tate Gersom Katjimune, the kindest and wisest man I know.
- My political mother, Honourable Lucia Ipumbu.
- My mentor, Lukas Nanyemba.
- Visionary leaders like Erwin Tjipuka, Sepo Haihambo, Nangula Uaandja, and Kosmas Egumbo are but a few leaders that have both led and stretched me.
- And Her Excellency, President Dr. Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, who believed in me enough to invite me into her

administration. I say to her that I commit to giving this my everything.

I draw inspiration from the quiet leadership of our Right Honorable Prime Minister, Dr. Elijah Ngurare, a servant leader who reminds me of Robin Sharma's book, *The Leader Who Had No Title*. And it is with this spirit that I step forward, not to wear a title, but to carry a responsibility.

We Must Not Look Away

Honorable members, we cannot claim to serve the people and remain silent when our children are murdered. I wish to use this powerful platform to speak against the murder of Ingrid Massdorp. ^{→ Similar to the notice of a question raised by Hon. Utaara Mootu.} A young 5-year-old pre-grade learner and joyful Namibian, whose body was found under a bridge in Veddersdal, Okahandja on our Independence Day, 21 March, just less than a month ago. It is reported that she was raped, strangled and dumped in water. We understand as public leaders, that the laws we pass in this House, in this Beacon of our Democracy, set the standard for what we are willing to hold ourselves accountable to, as a People. Justice must not be symbolic. It must be systemic. Every Namibian child deserves to grow up free from fear. Let us therefore continue in our work, of building a Namibia that we can all live in. May the soul of little Ingrid

Maasdorp, Rest in Eternal Peace, and may her family be comforted.

The Future Is Entrepreneurial - But We Must Make It So

I rise today not just as a public servant, but as a passionate advocate for **Namibian entrepreneurship**. But let us be honest - all of the Honorable members here, myself included, can never truly understand the plight of entrepreneurs in our country. Many of us may have an entrepreneurial spirit, we may even be engaged in entrepreneurial endeavours, however, we still receive a salary, and will therefore not fully understand the plight to be a proper entrepreneur with very little support from our communities and dare I say, government institutions.

According to the African Development Bank's **African Entrepreneurship Index**, Namibia ranks below the continental average in entrepreneurship ecosystems, largely due to limited access to finance, policy fragmentation, and low support for start-ups at grassroots levels. **We can, we must and henceforth shall do more for entrepreneurs and MSME's**. I repeat, we must do more to render the requisite financial, technical and market access support to entrepreneurs across our 14 regions, under each of our 57 local authorities and 121 constituencies. To quote the late Grace Hopper, US Navy admiral who is credited for

coining the phrase ***“rather ask for forgiveness than permission”*** - I too shall rather ask for forgiveness for being unapologetic about service delivery and our intentional pursuit to empower Namibian entrepreneurs, because entrepreneurship is not a luxury. It is in fact a key tenet for our growth and prosperity.

Youth Unemployment Is Not a Statistic - It's a National Emergency

If we are honest, which we are - our economy is not yet working for many. The latest Survey by the Namibia Statistics Agency reveals a national unemployment rate of 36.9%. Among our youth, it climbs to 44.4%. These are not numbers, these are lives. I am convinced that this burden, once inverted, could become our strength.

Notwithstanding these realities, I do not stand here to despair, but I stand here with conviction to contribute towards the collective leadership solution. Because these numbers also tell another story, that is one of potential. According to our Central Bank, our economy grew by 3.7% in 2024, and we are informed by our most capable Minister of Finance, Comrade Minister Shafudah, that we expect growth of 4.5% in 2025. This is a positive and optimistic forecast, not a political speech, testament to the

growing global interest in Namibia under a SWAPO lead government.

But growth without inclusion will not translate to development. If our young people are not part of this growth, if they cannot see it, participate and contribute towards it, it will not be sustained. We have promised hope and this is where our work begins.

Education: The Engine of Nationhood

Permit me to share that between 2017 and 2023, the number of learners in our education system grew by more than 120,000, an increase of 17%. But this surge was not matched by proportional growth in both teachers or facilities. We have observed a rising learner-to-teacher ratio, we still observe overcrowded classrooms, often forcing children into afternoon shifts, particularly in the early grades. Now this is not merely a logistical issue, it is also a function of development planning and certainly, a warning sign. A system under pressure will struggle to deliver quality and quality is what our young people deserve, and what our economy demands as guided by our Vision 2030. **What we want is Education, and not just certification.**

Yet, amidst these pressures, we are not underinvesting. Allow me to quote my Hon. Minister Sanet Steenkamp when she says ***“we are not spending on education, we are investing in education”***.

Our SWAPO lead Government invests approximately 20,000 Namibian Dollars per student, and as a percentage of GDP per capita, places us in the same league as countries like Austria, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Denmark and South Korea. So, this is not a call for more, which is relative, it is a call to do more with what we have.

We must confront the hard truth: investment alone does not translate to transformation. **Accountability must meet expenditure. Innovation must meet bureaucracy. And results must meet intention.**

Culture, Sport and Innovation Must Become Economic Pillars

Vote 27: Sport, Youth and National Service is allocated 1.26 billion Namibian Dollars for this financial year. I was asked on a panel last week whether this is enough, and I responded saying, no it is not. However, acknowledging the $\frac{2}{3}$ budget increase and acknowledging that real value is yet to be derived from that investment. Our charge is not only to spend, but to deliver. To ensure that every dollar unlocks capability. That every learner moves closer to opportunity and to ensure that the product prepared at primary level is equipped to perform at secondary level, thereby reducing the high rate of attrition. Education must become the engine of our productivity, underpinned by

Research and Development, it must close the gap through innovation, through sports, through the arts - but only by believing urgently and relentlessly in the potential of our people. Innovation will drive the future of our economy, and it will be shaped by those we empower today. We are a country rich in young people who are ready to build, ready to serve, ready to lead. Let us be worthy of them.

We Will Not Let You Down

This Ministry will not be driven by slogans. We will be driven by service, by results and by the quiet power of delivery.

We are already hard at work to improve the equity and quality of our education systems. To redress national social infrastructure deficits for both schools and sports facilities.

To the teacher in an overcrowded classroom - **we see you.**

To the young person waiting for your chance - **we hear your cry.**

And to every Namibian who still believes in the promise of this country - **we will not let you down.**

Let us collaborate to make Namibia the winning nation that she is. Henceforth, our sportsmen and women will play to win. Our musicians and creatives will shine and take their place amongst their contemporaries. Our youthful energy and intellectual

exploits will be developed, and harnessed to add value to **the only country we can call home – Namibia.**

2025/2026
Honorable speaker, I therefore so support the budget, inclusive of the annual membership of former first ladies that we have committed to remaining a member of.

I thank you.