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A Time Such as This: Standing in the Gap for the Namibian Youth.

Introduction *Deputy*

Honourable *Deputy* Speaker, Honourable Members of Parliament, fellow Namibians:

Allow me to open this moment by invoking the story of Queen Esther in the Holy Bible, a young woman rose from humble beginnings and was placed in a palace, not by accident, but by divine purpose.

Queen Ester stood in the gap for her people, risking her position, her comfort, and even her life to speak for those who had no voice. Today, I declare that Queen Esther of the Bible may be long gone, but I, Ester Ishiwa Haikola-Sakaria, am here, not in a palace but in this Honourable House, with a purpose just as bold. Like Esther, I Was Called for a Time Such As This.

I am here to stand up for the youth, to stand in the gap for the rejected, unemployed, talented but sidelined, and voiceless young people of Namibia. I have not come to Parliament for prestige. I have come to serve. *Queen* As Esther was placed in the palace to fulfill a greater cause, so have I been placed here, not for myself, but for the Namibian people.

As the great-granddaughter of the following public servant of the people, I am honored to walk in their footsteps, carrying forward their legacy of leadership, service, and dedication to the people.

1. Tatekulu Haikukutu yaShinangolo who reigned Oukwanyama for **two years** from (1858-1860)
2. Tatekulu Ohamba Weyulu yaHedimbi yaNghililewanga **2 years** (1884-1904)
3. Tatekulu Ohamba Nande yaHedimbi yaNghililewanga **7 years** (1904-1911)
4. Tatekulu Mandume yaNdemufayo **6 years** (1911-1917)
5. Tatekulu Kautwima KaKandjabanga, paramount chief Oukwanyama **27 years** (1884-1911)
6. Queen Hanyangha yaHamutenya **13 years** (1911-1924).

Humble servant of people who put others first and who believed that true greatness is not being served but serving others with joyful heart, commitment and dedication. I'm hereby to emulate their leadership style of selflessness.

~~The Youth and the Broken System~~

To the unemployed youths, poverty has a cruel way of stripping young people of their ability to dream and aspire, leaving them feeling powerless and stuck. Your silent struggles are not forgotten, we are carrying your burden here in Parliament, and we will fight to restore your hope and agency.

Young people of Namibia; those who pursued courses which the market cannot absorb such as Biochemistry, Microbiology, and countless other fields, yet now sit at home unemployed: we lug your affliction in this Parliament. We hear your cries, and we will not rest until the job market aligns with the skills you sacrificed so much to acquire. I know what it feels like to look for a job in your field for 10 good years and find none. I have been there.

To my dear former UNAM Readiness students, many of you had to leave your jobs to study full-time in the bridging Programme with fewer than 20 points. Now that you've qualified and been admitted into degree programmes, NASFAF denies you funding because of the very points you were trying to improve. This injustice will not be ignored, **your struggle is not in vain, and we will work to change this system.**

~~Vocational Training and Skills Development~~

Why are we still forcing all learners down one academic path when we know not every diamond shines the same?

The education system in Namibia has failed to recognize that not all learners are destined for academia, some are gifted in their hands, in craft, and in trade. Yet the government has only plus minus 50 fully functional schools with pre-vocational subjects.

~~Lets talk about the State of TVET in Namibia~~

The state of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Namibia is one that has seen commendable attention from our government. Through the Namibia Training Authority (NTA), we recognize and appreciate the prioritization of skills development and the establishment of Vocational Training Centers (VTCs) across most regions. However, while significant progress has been made, we must also acknowledge the challenges that continue to hinder the full potential of the sector.

At the grassroots level, pre-vocational subjects are still not widely offered in many schools across Namibia. These subjects are crucial in developing a passion for vocational training among young learners. Without early exposure, learners often overlook the TVET pathway and instead opt for academic institutions like UNAM, NUST, or IUM, often out of lack of awareness, not necessarily preference.

Take, for example, the subject Office Practice, which equips learners with marketable administrative skills by the time they reach Grade 11 or 12. These learners can enter the workforce immediately. Sadly, this subject has been phased out in many schools, particularly in the northern regions. Even respected schools like Concordia College have stopped offering it. The common reason given is financial strain, mainly due to recurring costs for paper and ink. This is unfortunate, as such essential subjects should be protected and promoted. Additionally, schools offering subjects like Design and Technology, clothing and fabrics, teachers often use their own personal money to facilitate practical projects for learners, a situation that is both unsustainable and unfair.

What's more concerning is that there are teachers who are qualified and ready to teach pre-vocational subjects, yet they are not being utilized because only a few schools offer these subjects. Their expertise is going to be a waste, and this represents a missed opportunity for both learners and the education system at large.

^{Deputy}
Honorable speaker, Honorable members

The Ministry of Education must ensure there is dedicated funding for pre-vocational subjects, as outlined in the national curriculum. If we are to build

a skilled workforce, then we must invest in foundational subjects that spark learners' interest in vocational education from an early age.

We also commend the government's forward-looking plans to convert VTCs into fully-fledged technical colleges. This transformation is a bold and necessary step. However, to successfully implement such a vision, we will require TVET experts in the sector and here lies another challenge. Currently, only NUST offers TVET-related diplomas, such as the Diploma in TVET Management or the TVET Trainer Diploma, both pegged at Level 6. If we truly want to professionalize the sector and elevate the status of vocational education, institutions of higher learning across Namibia must start offering TVET qualifications at more advanced levels and create more programmes that support pre-vocational subject combinations for aspiring educators.

Moreover, we urge the NTA and other relevant bodies to ensure that all VTCs offer as many courses as possible, particularly in emerging trades that reflect modern industry needs. Fields such as renewable energy, ICT, Agri-tech, digital fabrication, and smart construction should be prioritized to future-proof our workforce.

While we applaud the milestones reached so far, there is still much work to be done. From curriculum funding at school level to qualification expansion in higher education, and from institutional transformation to regional inclusion, TVET must be elevated, expanded, and respected.

Deputy
Honorable Speaker, Honorable members

At this point, we extend our sincere gratitude to Dr Nkechi Nelson for reintroducing vocational education at Cosmos High School. This is the spirit we need, responsive, future forward, and youth-focused. Well done sir.

With deep gratitude, I give thanks to the Lord of Heaven's Armies for lifting me into this calling. It has always been You, Lord, may I serve and sanctify your name in this house."

To my late grandparents, Ester Abraham ya Vatileni and Thomas Moses Shinana, your prayers were not in vain. I stand here because of you.

To the Youth Power Group (now VYG), thank you for teaching me to be a visionary youth.

To the Affirmative Repositioning Movement, thank you for believing in me and giving me this platform to serve.

To ^{our} ~~my~~ Activist-in-Chief, Okaana KomBorni, Professor Dr. Job Shipululo Amupanda, whose brilliance my father once likened to a rare gem forged in the fires of wisdom and courage, a leader molded not just by intellect, but by an unshakable commitment to justice. A revolutionary mind of our time, whose words echo in our minds: "***lilongo ihaimangululwa kaambada***" indeed, true struggle is never abandoned by real fighters. Thank you for leading with purpose.

To my favorite person, my dearest husband Tate Baby, Champ, thank you for being tough and gentle at the same time, you have been my strength and You make the hard days bearable.

To my father Vinia Haikola, my biggest fan tati "Ishiwa wange oo, omwene okuli pwoove mkwanekaa", you are the best dad I could ever ask for.

To my mother Ndavavelao Matiide Shinana, indeed, *owavava Elao Shili nghelo*.

To my family and friends, to mention few, Haukongos, Karomhos, Teopo, Padelia, Kristofina Niita, Tusnelde, Frieda, Rakel, Sunday, Lukas Nghihalwa, Dr Lucia, Dr Nuyoma and many more.

Fellow youth, be assured that that everything we touch in this House becomes better. We will tear apart what does not work, and build what will work.

~~Budget Critique:~~

A Budget That Ignores the Youth Cannot Be Supported.

Honourable ^{DEPUTY} Speaker, Honorable members,

I rise with a heavy heart to say: I do not support this budget. Because it has failed the youth.

“To win the future, we must place youth development at the center” says Prof Amupanda

Let us begin with facts:

Recent statistics produced by the NSA stated that Young people under the age of 35, made up 71% of the total population. This demographic majority means that the youth are not a minority group, but the face of the nation. Therefore, **every national challenges affecting Namibia should be assessed through the lens of this dominant youth population**, because their realities define the country's future.

This budget claims to prioritise the youth, yet the youth ministry's budget vote is not even in the top 10 allocations.

However, it offers the construction of two stadiums and this is not youth development. Is that our solution to 71% of Namibians being youth? Is building stadiums the answer to a national crisis of unemployment and skills mismatch?

There is no targeted funding to address the skills mismatch or support strategic skills acquisition.

We are producing thousands of graduates, yet industries continue to say our youth lack the skills they need. Why are we allowing institutions to offer courses that the market cannot absorb? There must be intake limits based on real economic realities.

All in all, the budget does not include concrete plans to address:

- Graduate unemployment
- Skills alignment with industry
- Semi and unskilled unemployed Namibians (Tell me how is this budget allocation going to empower a grade 5 drop out in Otamanzi Constituency who in his entire life only have a Namibian ID and a voter's card?)

A good budget is not just numbers it is strategy.

What are the realities on the ground?

Returning funds to Treasury, as one constituency councilor recently celebrated on radio, is not a sign of prudence, it is a sign of incompetence. That money could have curbed unemployment or improved a local school, it would have done something better in that region.

^{Deputy} Honourable ~~Speaker~~, to effectively reduce the soaring unemployment rate, especially among our youth, the government must be **deliberate in attracting investors** to set up **labor-intensive industries** within our borders.

We must ask: **Where are the factories?**

One strategic area is the establishment of **textile and garment factories**. This industry has the potential to **employ thousands of unskilled and semi-skilled workers** with minimal training required. Countries like **Ethiopia and Bangladesh** have used this model to absorb large numbers of unemployed citizens, why can't Namibia?

Another example is **agro-processing plants**, especially for commodities we already produce in abundance. Instead of exporting raw materials, we must **add value locally**, and in doing so, **create jobs across rural and urban areas**.

The truth is, **Namibia does not lack raw materials, it lacks industries.** If we are serious about addressing unemployment, we must be serious about industrialization, **factories must rise** in Namibia.

Deputy

Honourable Speaker, Honorable members

Let us talk about **Skills Mismatch**

We must ask: **Why are institutions offering courses for which there is no market in Namibia?**

We propose that:

- All tertiary institutions conduct labour market research with industries
- Intake for oversaturated programmes be capped
- Industry input become mandatory in curriculum design

Gender-Responsive Budgeting and Unpaid Care Work

This budget is also gender blind. Budgeting Must Reflect Real Lives. It is a norm that every ministry must integrate gender-responsive planning. However, only two ministries **Urban** and **Gender** explicitly presented gender considerations in their budgets. That is not enough.

Let us talk about **Unpaid Care Workers**, a group whose contribution is often invisible yet deeply essential.

A study by Ananias, Mogotsi *et al* (2023) on older persons and community care in Namibia reveals that **60% of elderly people are female**, and an overwhelming **95% of their unpaid caregivers are also female**. These are women, often family members, who dedicate their time to care for the elderly, the sick, and people living with disabilities, without any form of remuneration.

Unpaid care work has far-reaching implications. It hinders women from pursuing paid employment, professional development, or even personal

growth. It limits them to the private space, where their labour, though critical is neither recognized nor compensated. In most cases, the only source of income in these caregiving households is the grant received by the elderly or disabled person, which is insufficient to meet both their needs and those of the caregiver.

Let us compare this: in formal institutions such as old age homes, cleaners, nurses, and social workers are paid for doing the exact same care work. Yet in our homes and communities, caregivers perform these duties daily, without salaries, without support. This is an injustice.

Therefore, **unpaid care work must no longer be treated as charity or duty, it is work, and it must be valued as such.** We must begin the conversation about budgeting for and compensating unpaid caregivers. Their contribution sustains families, communities, and even the healthcare system. It is time we give dignity to this work by ensuring it is recognized, supported, and paid for.

Honourable Speaker, let us address a silent but persistent injustice, **the lack of budgetary provision for sanitary pads.**

The government continues to allocate funds for **condoms and other sexual reproductive materials**, citing public health and reproductive rights. While that is necessary, it must be acknowledged that **sex is a choice, but menstruation is not.** Menstruation is a biological reality that no girl or woman can opt out of, yet there is **no government provision for free sanitary pads**, even for the most vulnerable: unemployed women and school girls.

This oversight undermines menstrual dignity and reinforces gender inequality. Many girls miss school days or even drop out altogether because they cannot afford pads. Unemployed women are left to manage their periods in undignified and unsafe ways. Meanwhile, we continue to normalize the state's silence on this deeply gendered issue.

We cannot speak of empowerment or equality if we ignore a **fundamental health and hygiene need** that affects more than half of the population.

We call for:

- **Free sanitary pads for all girls and unemployed women of menstruating age**
- **A dedicated budget line for menstrual health under reproductive health services**
- **Equal dignity for our girls and women, in the same way that condoms are prioritized**

Menstrual health is not a luxury. It is a right.

And if the government can fund reproductive choices, then it must fund menstrual necessities with the same urgency.

I SO Submit.