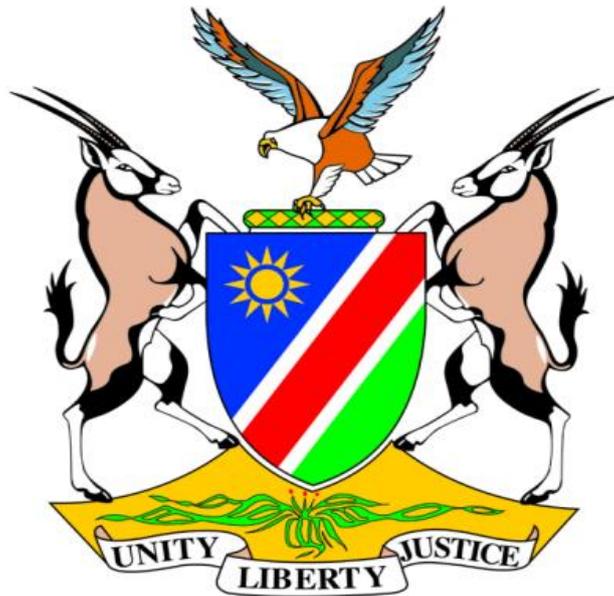


REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



STATEMENT BY

HIS EXCELLENCY DR HAGE G. GEINGOB,

PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE 7th SESSION OF THE

6th PARLIAMENT

FEBRUARY 13, 2018

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;**

- **Hon. Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for International Relations and Cooperation;**
- **Leader of the official opposition, Honourable McHenry Venaani;**
- **Honourable Members of Parliament;**
- **Madam Monica Geingos, First Lady of the Republic of Namibia;**
- **Vice President of the Republic of Namibia, Comrade Nangolo Mbumba and Madam Mbumba;**

- **Former President of the Republic of Namibia, Comrade Lucas Pohamba and Madam Pohamba;**
- **Former Speaker of the National Assembly, Dr. Theo-Ben Gurirab;**
- **Former Chairperson of the National Council, Mr Asser Kapere;**
- **Your Lordship Peter Shivute, Chief Justice;**
- **Your Lordship Petrus Damaseb, Deputy Chief Justice, Hon. Judges and other Members of the Judiciary;**

- **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;**

I am pleased to be here this afternoon to mark the Opening of the 7th Session of the 6th Parliament under the theme, *"Enhancing partnership to strengthen good governance in Namibia."*

As you are aware, the opening of Parliament is a ceremonial event and I will therefore not dwell on a detailed accountability report, which will be comprehensively presented during the State of the

Nation Address. I will rather use the opportunity to highlight important aspects of our governance architecture, in line with your theme for the year.

During the official opening of Parliament last year, I briefly introduced the concept of the “trinity”. In the context of Institutions, the “trinity” is reflected in our Executive, Judiciary and Legislature, which operate inter-dependently.

I had the honour to open the Legal Year for the Judiciary on Wednesday last week and the following day I opened the First Executive meeting for the year. Today, it is once again my honour to preside over the opening of the Legislative year.

It is apt that we focus our attention on strengthening good governance, or what I term effective governance.

It is of utmost importance that members of this august House pay particular attention to the agenda for the year and ensure that the Bills tabled are thoroughly debated and passed timeously.

During the National Elections just over three years ago, the People of Namibia exercised their democratic right to elect me as the President of the Republic of Namibia and yourselves, as Members of Parliament.

We were elected to govern on

behalf of the People who, through the voting process, delegated their sovereign power to us. I therefore repeat this important phrase – That we are first and foremost accountable to the People – to serve their interest and not our personal interests.

Our ability to govern effectively, will face scrutiny this year and that is why I have declared the year 2018 the *Year of Reckoning*. We have the responsibility to

demonstrate that we are committed to administer the Organs of State – on behalf of the People. As to whether we fulfil these expectations, our ability will be determined next year in 2019, when the People will either extend our mandate to govern on their behalf, or rescind that mandate by voting us out of office.

Serious work therefore awaits all of us this year, as the Nation will be watching.

I am informed that a total of twenty (20) bills are likely to be tabled in Parliament during this year. I have learnt with disappointment that only nineteen (19) Bills were passed, out of the forty (40) Bills tabled during the last session. I look forward to quality debate around the following Bills, the Education Bill; Plant Breeders and Farmers' Rights Bill; Financial Institution and Market Bill and Prevention and Combating of Torture Bill, to name but a few.

I expect that this august House, in its deliberations, will keep in mind the Executive theme for the year, that of Reckoning, which includes due recognition for delivery and consequences for non-delivery.

Honourable Speaker,

Our Constitution together with our Parliament, form the cornerstone of our democracy. Echoing the words of Atifete Jahjaga who said, *“Democracy must be built through open societies that share*

information. When there is information, there is enlightenment. When there is debate, there are solutions. When there is no sharing of power, no rule of law, no accountability, there is abuse, corruption, subjugation and indignation."

Our Parliament does not only reflect our open society but also provides a platform for information sharing, debate and sober discourse on matters of national importance.

We debate to find solutions and practice power sharing through democratic elections. We further strive to espouse the principles of the rule of law and accountability in order to shun abuse, corruption, subjugation and all “isms”.

Ultimately the quality of the debate, which influences the final output, is determined by how effective Standing Committees operate. I believe more can be done to enhance the effectiveness of our Standing Committees.

The selection of Members serving on the Committees; research; prior consultation with stakeholder groups and adequate preparation, will all enhance the quality of debate and the laws that are eventually passed, by this House.

The Parliament being at the heart of inclusive and representative democracy, has an obligation to engage its constituents on matters on the agenda of the House, as you represent them in the House.

You are in turn expected to transmit information timeously to your constituencies, on matters deliberated on by the House. You are duty bound to ensure the views of citizens are considered and reflected in your deliberations.

Stakeholder consultation is therefore a prerequisite and Members of Parliament are encouraged to uphold national interest in deliberations.

It is for this reason that we have established a narrative around nation building and inclusivity, in order to embed the doctrine of unity and shared obligation, within our society. Effective governance cannot be fully achieved in a country fraught with division and factionalism. I will therefore never tire of regularly repeating the narrative of inclusivity, through the concept of the Namibian House; where No Namibian should feel left out (unless of course, one decides to

exclude oneself); as we build One Namibia – One Nation; by pulling together in the same direction in the spirit of Harambee.

Honourable Speaker,

In line with your theme for the year, I believe that to strengthen our governance architecture, we have to enhance the twin principles upon which effective governance rests, namely, transparency and accountability.

Of the two, accountability is recognized as the most fundamental requirement for effective governance and a critical component for representative democracy.

I have received media queries on the status of declaration of assets by Members of Parliament, which queries I have duly referred to the Speaker. However, there are perceptions that the declaration of assets of Members of Parliament should be made publicly available.

A case in point, is today's media headline, alleging that the Speaker has not honoured his commitment to publicly release these declarations. I therefore leave this matter to this august House, to provide clarity as to whether declarations by Parliamentarians should be publicly availed, or not.

Honourable Speaker,

Mahatma Gandhi once said, "*It is wrong and immoral to escape the consequences of one's act.*"

If that is the case, then let us all ensure that as elected officials, our acts on behalf of the people are good, so that these good acts lead to positive outcomes, rather than bad acts which will result in negative outcomes. Therefore, let us be accountable and transparent in our actions because if we cannot retain the trust of the people, then we cannot effectively govern on their behalf.

In keeping with your theme of *"...strengthening good governance in Namibia"* I would like to urge the frugal use of resources at our disposal, in the Executive, Judiciary and Legislature, as a means to reverse the financial constraints that have resulted from economic headwinds faced over the past three years.

I have noticed, with concern, that members of parliament, who are responsible for their respective constituencies, have added international constituencies to their list of responsibilities as well. I have no problem with people travelling as long as such travel results in tangible benefits for the people of Namibia. Parliament as we know it, is described to be "sitting" or "in session" and not as a "traveling" Parliament.

We should travel for concrete reasons and not just because there is invitation to travel.

Similarly, I have learnt of the silent debate, as to whether all Members of Parliament are entitled to Diplomatic Passports. While there is no law governing the issuance of Diplomatic Passports to Members of Parliament, a Cabinet decision was taken, to permit such issuance. I do however believe it is now opportune to look into the matter of Diplomatic Passports.

I have discovered while conducting research on this matter, that in various parliaments across the continent and the world, not every member of Parliament carries a Diplomatic Passport.

A Diplomatic Passport is not an entitlement. Rather, it is a tool to help facilitate diplomatic work, being carried out in the interests of the State. It is meant to enhance efficiencies and not to enhance prestige.

Supposing a Member of Parliament, who is not prohibited from conducting private business, utilizes a Diplomatic Passport on a private business trip, would that be consistent with the values espoused by the members of this august House?

Honourable Speaker,

I am aware that historically, Parliament has struggled to obtain a quorum, resulting in delays in the execution of critical work.

Now that I am out of Parliament, I am able to follow proceedings live and I do observe empty seats, not only from the Executive but also from both sides, including backbenchers. I am informed that backbenchers travel frequently as well.

Now that I have addressed travel in the Executive, I am interested to hear what the Legislature intends to do, to contain travel expenditure.

Honourable Speaker,

Namibia was recently recognized for outstanding progress made in promoting Gender Equality, by the African Gender Forum, on the margins of the recently concluded AU Summit.

This recognition is attributable to the SWAPO policy of 50/50 gender representation and in that regard, I encourage all political parties to emulate this progressive policy, of the ruling party.

In our efforts to build a more inclusive Namibian House, we should continue to build on these gains, so that by the next national election, this august House will reflect even more balanced gender representation.

We should equally harness the current window of 'Demographic Dividend' that has opened for Namibia, by empowering and including the youth into positions of leadership.

I am proud to have promoted long serving youthful leaders, emanating from the youth structures, to full Ministerial and Deputy Ministerial portfolios. These include the Hon. Mushelenga, Hon. Utoni, Hon. Simataa and Hon. Nekundi to the Executive and last year's appointment of Hon. Kooper to the National Assembly.

This is the year of reckoning.

I therefore, urge all of you to foster a culture of strong work ethic and zero tolerance for violence against women and children. It is both deplorable and a painful reality, that women and children continue to suffer and lose their lives, at the hands of those they love and trust the most.

In closing, Sam Ewing once said, *“Hard work spotlights the character of people: some turn up their sleeves, some turn up their*

noses, and some don't turn up at all."

Let this year spotlight the character of the Namibian people. Let us demonstrate that in times of difficulty we do not eschew responsibility by turning up our noses or not turning up at all.

Rather, in difficult times, we turn up our sleeves to work even harder, governing effectively on behalf of the People of Namibia,

for the sake of economic progress and national prosperity.

With these few words, it is now my honour to declare the 7th Session of the 6th Parliament, officially open.

I wish you a successful year in which you achieve significant milestones, in line with your dedicated theme.

**May God Almighty Bless you all
and Bless the Republic of Namibia.**

I thank you.