



National Assembly

15 SEPTEMBER IS INTERNATIONAL DAY OF DEMOCRACY

The United Nations General Assembly acknowledged the resilience and universality of the principles of democracy in November 2007 by declaring 15 September the International Day of Democracy to celebrate democracy worldwide. Highly symbolical, the date coincides with the adoption in September 1997 of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Universal Declaration on Democracy.

This is an important opportunity to engage citizens in discussion about the meaning and future directions of democracy. In 2008, around 50 parliaments each organised some form of event to mark this occasion. The Namibian Parliament also started to commemorate the International Day of Democracy on 15 September 2008.

The word “democracy” originates from two Greek words: demos, which means “the people”, and kratein, which means “to rule”. This “rule by the people” was first practised in Greece in the sixth century BC and has been evolving as a system of government ever since.

The theme chosen by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) for 2015 is “Public participation for democracy”. This theme offers ample space to discuss the extent to which the right to participate is respected by government and exercised by citizens, as well as ways to increase public participation in democracy.

Public participation is the bedrock upon which democracy rests. People have both rights and responsibilities to take part in democracy. This includes formal participation such as voting in elections, and also informal methods where people inform themselves about public affairs, have political conversations and demonstrate tolerance for views that are different from their own.

Meanwhile, public authorities, including parliaments, have a responsibility to provide education, information and encouragement in regard to public participation.

Taking action to encourage and strengthen public participation in democracy can:

- Enrich and renew democracy
- Help promote sustainable political decisions, action and policy – by recognising and communicating the needs and interests of all involved
- Strengthen understanding and action for human rights, and have a positive impact on efforts to eradicate poverty and hunger and to achieve international development goals
- Empower and protect citizens, and realise the fundamental democratic right of participation
- Promote people’s well-being and the development of their skills
- Ensure and increase active members of political parties – which are vital organisations in a strong democracy
- Promote peace and foster transitions into democracy

Public participation is based on the freedoms of expression, assembly and association, together with the right to take part in public affairs. These are all well-established provisions in international human rights law.

The Parliament of Namibia has since its establishment in 1990 encouraged public participation and ensured that Parliament is accessible to citizens by facilitating, amongst others:

- Tours of the Parliament Building
- Public galleries at Parliament for observing the debate in the Chambers
- Live Parliamentary Coverage on NBC TV – Channel 2
- Press gallery for the Media and providing the media practitioners with the information needed to inform the citizens about the proceedings at Parliament
- Parliament website: www.parliament.na
- Soliciting public input during Public Hearings of parliamentary committees
- Provisions for citizenry to make submissions to parliamentary committees
- Participating at various trade fairs where members of the public can visit the Parliament stand
- Keeping Parliament Library open to the public

The Parliament of Namibia, in celebrating the International Day of Democracy on 15 September 2015, recommits itself to the values of democracy, which include public participation; and therefore continues to advocate for public participation.

Your Parliament wishes all the people of Namibia a joyous International Day of Democracy on 15 September.

