

Question 46

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS BY HON. NICO SMIT, ON NASA ORACLES,

Background on ORACLES *Research project refer to as ORACLES*

Which is -

ORACLES is an air borne research project of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) of the United States of America. ORACLES stands for “Observations of Aerosols above Clouds and their Interactions”.

The South East Atlantic is home to one of three permanent clouds in the world. These clouds play a key role on regional climatic conditions and is highly important to the global climate system. During the dry season (July-October) the South East Atlantic clouds interact with dense layers of smoke originating from veld fires in Southern and Central Africa. This interaction affects both global and regional temperatures and rainfall patterns.

ORACLES aims to investigate this interaction to determine the role it plays in understanding regional and global climate temperatures and the longer term effects this may have in light of changes in climate, in order to improve future projections of global and regional climate and rainfall patterns.

Why Namibia?

It is said that while Namibia is home to one the three permanent low-level clouds, the other two are situated off the West coast of the United States and West coast of South America, however unlike the other two locations, Namibia is the only such location with steady supply of aerosol particles in the form of smoke from inland fire that moves across Namibia during August to October and gets mixed with the cloud. Therefore, the research aims to understand the impact of the interaction between large smoke and the cloud, thus making Namibia the natural laboratory for such research.

Let me emphasize that we live in an era of Information Technology. And given the work I do in the Namibian Government I can say with confidence that only countries that optimize Information Technology today will position themselves to become winner. What Namibia needs to do therefore is to optimize our geographical location and position ourselves to be the centre of excellence in terms of aeronautics. Let me go further in informing that in Africa today it is well known that countries like Ethiopia and others are embarking on their space programs. There is no reason why Namibia should not do the same. I therefore, want to emphasize that our fear and obsession with being spied on, will keep us behind in terms of science and technology advancements.

Questions and Answers

Question 1:

Why is it that NASA was permitted to commence with the project a month before security vetting had taken place?

Answer:

The project was approved by Cabinet, and the overflight and Landing authorisation for the NASA ER-2 and P-3 aircraft was issued on 18 August 2016, and the 2016 programme was launched at the Walvis Bay International Airport on the 26 August and run up to 29 September 2016, through offshore flights. Six (6) Namibian students plus one South African participated in the 2016 deployment. Furthermore, NASA scientists held outreach activities in Henties Bay UNAM Campus and participated at the National Commission on Research, Science and Technology (NCRST) Ongwediva Science Fair and held talks at NUST. Similarly, an amount of N\$ 10 million was expended in the country for goods and services.

During the 2018 deployment, NASA plans to increase the number of Namibian students who will participate in the project.

Question 2:

Is it true that high-tech spy equipment was placed by NASA in Namibia without the knowledge of its partner in NUST nor the Namibian security and/or intelligence agencies?

Answer:

First and foremost I want to make it clear that I am not aware of any high-tech spy equipment brought in Namibia by NASA. What we know is that NASA entered into an agreement with NUST for Cooperation in the Aerosol Robotic Network (AERONET) in September 2015. AERONET and ORACLES are of course linked as they both study particles in the atmosphere or aerosols. However, AERONET is ground-based, while ORACLES is an airborne research project. ~~I am~~ ^{our} **implementing the AERONET project with the consent and under supervision of NUST, NASA has brought in equipment that are located at different places in Namibia.**

Needless to say, that because of the advance of Technology, countries who need to gather information from others will not necessarily have to travel to Namibia. They can do so sitting comfortably in their capital cities of wherever.

We have ^{established} set-up a Technical Committee, which includes NUST and the security agencies, to deal with these issues.

Question 3:

Given that recent developments have led to the existing agreement between NUST and NASA being abandoned whilst a new agreement is being re-negotiated, why is it that the project is not being suspended pending finalization of that agreement?

Answer:

The agreement between NUST and NASA has not been abandoned, what the Technical Committee is trying to do now is to come up with a draft agreement between the National Commission on Research Science and Technology (NCRST) and NASA on ORACLES. In fact the agreement will serve as legal framework for any similar projects. As a result, NASA will only continue with the project in Namibia, once the agreement ORACLES has been signed. We hope to conclude and sign the agreement during the course of this year.

Question 4:

Was MIRCO consulted on the nature of this proposed project prior to its commencement?

Answer:

Again as stated earlier, the matter was taken to Cabinet which I am part of, where it was thoroughly discussed before approval. I also consulted my colleague, the Minister of Higher Education, Training and Innovation, prior to that.

Following consultation

I thank you

Answer in your introduction.