

Contribution to Budget

Honourable Benjamin Ulenga

27 March 2013

Comrade Deputy Speaker Honourable Members of Parliament, I am happy to be back in the "Land of the Brave" after a brief visit to Cape Town, RSA, where I visited mainly for medical reasons.

This is therefore the first time I have the opportunity to remark publicly on the recent losses suffered by Our Nation thru the passing of Dr Abraham Iyambo, late Minister of Education, the Honourable Maurus Nekero, Late Governor of the Kavango Region, and now recently my good Comrade Rapama Kamehozu, late Governor of Omaheke Region.

The loss of these Comrades and others, in the prime of their lives and careers is not only a loss to the government but indeed an irreplaceable loss to the entire nation. May their soul rest in peace.

Madame Deputy Speaker, there has been over the years much speculation and indeed research done about the history and evolution of the human race, and great and interesting theories have been formulated regarding its future survival. Students of history keep debating over the influence of individual personalities on the course of social development. Some say that history is determined by individuals with strong personalities while others counter that it's rather events and the actions of the great masses of the people that chart the counsel of history, rather than the thinking or actions of single individual personalities.

In this regard, Comrade Deputy Speaker, and meditating over the passing of Abraham Iyambo, John Pandeni and others, I couldn't help thinking about those other Namibian sons and daughters who had left us too soon over the years; departing in the prime of their lives; or some even before the peaking of their careers. I often ask myself how would they have influenced the course of events. How would they have taken the sometimes unexpected turn of course in the development of our country? Here I have in mind those revered departed heroes and heroines: The Nanyemba's, the Lubowski's, the Thlabanello's, the Hatu's the Hatrikulipi's, the Tjongarero's, the Kankauketu's, the !Gob's, the Mbandekas; the Tjipahuras, the Shanghala's, the Iilya's.... the list goes on and on and on....

Honourable Deputy Speaker sadly, the rubbishing of important state and democratic institutions does not seem to stop at parliament, but is becoming more widespread, affecting more public institutions.

During recent weeks and months and especially after the SWAPO Party Congress in November/December 2012, the Namibian Media has been flooding the Nation with a so-called "***Fait accompli***" namely that the Honourable Hage Geingob is the next president of the Republic of Namibia after President Pohamba's term finishes on March 21st 2015.

Comrade Deputy Speaker, such false and unfounded lies and distorted information is being spread and foisted on to the nation as undisputed fact and in such a way that there cannot be any space for doubting. This indeed is another devilish attempt by the enemies of democracy, to render any presidential and national election in 2014 just another "rubberstamping".

Comrade Deputy Speaker, the regular holding of national elections is an important democratic institution itself. Only thru such action can the true leaders of the nation be elected. Those who try to replace this important activity of the nation by bamboozling, blinding, coercing or drugging the people into believing that the leaders have been already been appointed are guilty of a serious political misdemeanor.

Comrade Deputy Speaker, the determination of any new head of state and government can be done only thru nation-wide presidential elections! Not otherwise.

No amounts of premature rehearsals on how to wear the presidential crown will make anyone, president. Namibians must still elect. That means: choose!

We therefore call on the Media, government and ruling party: do not kill our democracy. Stop behaving as if we already have a president-elect. You are seriously jumping the gun, all of you!

Madame Deputy Speaker, on issues more closely related to the Budget, our first concern is about the adequate and successful education of our young people, of Namibians generally and of everyone else who has chosen to reside in our beautiful country.

The situation regarding education remains a catastrophe. I am afraid to say ordinary budgetary means cannot any longer be expected to turn around the situation... the nation will have to resort to extra-ordinary efforts...including a change of the present government.

At the beginning of 2013 government announced the institution of free and compulsory education at primary school level. After we called for these for years; to this we say: government continues to run roughshod of the constitution with regard to Article 20. After 23 years the government still fails to provide for effective means to realize this constitutional obligation. Government is therefore still in complete breach of the constitution.

This house needs to amend the relevant sections of the Education Act so as to provide for effective means to make education (a) compulsory, and (b) free of charge, for the first eight (8) years of schooling.

Moreover, Comrade Deputy Speaker, for our nation to successfully pursue our development objectives not only primary school education but indeed all education should be "free" in other words it should be financed through public funding because education is the "priority of priorities".

On poverty, unemployment and job-creation, I must draw your attention to the fact that the armed struggle to liberate Namibia from 1966 to 1989 took us 23 years before an agreement was reached between the RSA (apartheid SA) and the liberation movement and the international community for Namibia's independence to be implemented. 23 years with a loss of many thousands of lives. Now after another 23 years of freedom and independence that we got so dearly, our poverty situation has worsened, the unemployment rate is higher and the rich-poor divide more unbridgeable than ever before. We need to remember that this poverty is structural; it is built into the system. You cannot have those amounts and concentrations of wealth without the corresponding poverty figures.

I believe firmly that it requires a more unrelenting attention from the government and a higher degree of state intervention and involvement to make a dent on abject poverty in Namibia.

Unfortunately government has been intervening more against the poor rather than on their behalf when it comes to fighting poverty. The threatened imprisonment of striking workers and their leaders has not gone unnoticed by keen observers of our situation; as well as the interception of many marches organized in demand of wages and salary increases or the improvement of working conditions.

I'm glad to note that SWAPO Party is finally catching up on the CoD regarding some key policy issues. I suspect it will only be a few more weeks before the ruling party declares itself in favour of BIG – the Basic Income Grant!

Though it's not possible to fill their places we would best honour our dead by emulating their passion with which they pursued their lives' objectives.

Comrade Deputy Speaker, allow me to go back to the equally depressing realities of our present political life in our country.

We from the Congress of Democrats (CoD) have always cautioned that our parliament, the supreme institution of the state when it comes to making laws and deciding on government policy, has been rendered a mere rubberstamp of Cabinet.

This political problem is primarily structural, in that the numbers of people the President can appoint as Ministers and Deputy Ministers is virtually unlimited, whereas there can be only 72 members of the National Assembly: and further in the fact that Parliament and the Executive are not properly segregated, therefore we have Cabinet coming to do their work right here in the National Assembly!

My dear Madame Speaker, I am glad to say today that the view that our parliament is held in bondage by the executive and is used for rubberstamping purposes only is no longer a view that's limited to the CoD only. It is indeed the view of a considerable number of our citizen's in and outside of this house and indeed inside and outside the ruling party.

The emasculation of parliament started from day one, when the first President decided to appoint the majority of MP's in the Cabinet as Ministers and Deputy Ministers. Successive administrations have followed the same path, making sure that back bench MP's whether from the ruling party or opposition were rendered irrelevant and ineffective. This was also reflected in the MPs practical work, the staffing of their offices, and their remuneration.

We have pointed to this situation as being problematic, but had been ridiculed by Ruling Party MPs and by Cabinet members for holding this view.

Ironically, the first Prime Minister, Right Honourable Hage Geingob used to blame it on the small size of opposition seats in Parliament, but he later learned the real facts when he returned as MP, what it was all about...

I am now convinced that this political anomaly can only be corrected by amending the relevant sections of our constitution. We are therefore saying the Namibian Constitution need to be amended to safeguard the powers, effectiveness and independence of parliament.

The Ruling Party has been catching up also on the 50/50 gender issue concerning the equal representation of women which has been CoD policy for a decade now. It is a pity that the ruling party needs another congress just to decide on such an issue considered to be a matter of course in many other parties.

The position taken by government on the so-called struggle kids so far has been more encouraging. The imperative of Nation building requires that government policies be more over-arching and nationally inclusive, rather than minutely specific and divisive.

If all the youth in the country are catered for then there cannot be a special category of "struggle kids" any-longer. There are indeed many other children who would also fall in the same category if the definition of the relevant social problems were regarded more generally.

In the same manner we have been calling on the government to take leadership of the demands for Reparations, Restitution, and Restoration by our communities which were subjected to genocide and other forms of extermination and brutalization by the Colonial Government of Imperial Germany.

These communities and groups against which atrocities were committed belong to the Namibian Nation and they deserve to have all state resources including diplomatic action at the highest level to achieve their demands.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we therefore see these demands as the demands of the Namibian nation, and they should therefore be articulated by the toppest representatives of the state and government, while the groups and communities also have their own way of articulating themselves.

On the funding of political parties, what cabinet has proposed recently in this regard is ridiculous to say the least. It is high time that government takes seriously the need and demands of political parties for the regularization of political funding for parties. For the SWAPO Party to continue giving other parties peanuts while they are taking millions is just not fair; funding must be divided more equally amongst the qualifying parties.

Finally Comrade Deputy Speaker, I seriously doubt whether this budget that doesn't make provision for the proper funding of MPs programs deserves the support of the same MPs I myself cannot give my unconditional support to this appropriation act.

I rest my case