**Budget Speech By Hon Evelyn Taeyele, SWAPO Chief Whip**

**Introduction**

**Honourable Speaker**

**Honourable Members**

I rise to humbly make my contribution to this very important debate.

First of all, let me commend the Honourable Minister of Finance and his all-inclusive team for their tireless efforts and commitment in drawing up our National Budget. The current budget allocation again reflects the Government’s devotion towards combating poverty and to advance education and skills development of its Namibian people. The Budget is formulated to ensure that the economy continues to expand at a strong pace, and to reduce the fiscal deficit, with the overall objective of prospering the nation.

Namibia is a constitutional state, governed according to the principles of separation of powers. Being the law-making body and the representative of the people, we believe in the principle that money with the Government belongs to the people and we have the sacred responsibility to spend it prudently and wisely for the welfare of our people, especially the poor and the downtrodden.

**Honourable Speaker**

**Honourable Members**

I stand here today championing a cause for all Namibians who hold the view that under the current government administration:

* the economy grows,
* crime has fallen and continues to fall,
* education and social services have continued to improve,
* their quality of life continues to get better,
* and Namibia will **Move Forward - from poverty to prosperity.**

**Honourable Speaker**

**Honourable Members**

The SWAPO Party Election Manifesto states clearly and I quote*…”We are aware that in order to effectively alleviate poverty, unemployment and underdevelopment, we must pursue socio-economic development policies and programmes that are people-centred and inclusive”*

End of quote.

The plight of vulnerable families has been getting worse in recent years. The challenge in front of us is formidable. We need to face it with maximum compassion.

When we came into office just over a year ago, we promised to transform our country by adopting a more people-centred development agenda and by so doing, deliver more money in people’s pockets. I wish to stress that this will not be achieved simply by promoting handouts. Our fundamental approach should be to build a self-reliant people who are able to sustainably generate their own funds. This is the surest way of sustainability defeating poverty and delivering the absolute rights of liberty and social justice for all our people.

This requires a blend of initiatives ranging from opening additional opportunities for employment and income generation, to ensuring that the social safety net is adequate and targeted to those who cannot support themselves. This should be done while avoiding the creation of a dependency syndrome.

Last year the government has significantly increased the State Pension and this year will increase it again by N$ 100 Namibian Dollars. It is a clear indication that the government is determined to ensure the security of its vulnerable senior citizens. Thus I fully support the proposal from Ministry of Finance to increase old-age pension and to improve the coverage in respect of Orphans and Vulnerable Children.

The ultimate goal of the Government’s economic growth and development strategy is to improve the quality of life of all Namibians. We attach the highest priority to education, health, housing, water and sanitation as the most strategic areas for eradication of poverty and entrenchment of development.

Government has deliberately shifted from a poverty reduction to a poverty eradication objective. To achieve such a bold move requires supportive policies, projects, programmes and a positive mindset. This requires close consultation with the poor to identify opportunities for self-reliance that are built on their interests, capabilities and the micro-environment. It also requires challenging all able citizens to take pride in fending for themselves and contributing towards the development of their country.

Employment creation has the potential of reducing poverty and its effect on social life. In an effort to address this, Government has instituted several anti-poverty programmes that among others include, training and skills development as concrete long-term measures to address poverty.

**Honourable Speaker**

**Honourable Members**

Education creates knowledge which promotes empowerment!

In terms of promoting growth, the Government has made tremendous progress in providing universal access to education. I have to commend our government for implementing a free primary and now secondary education system in accordance with Article 20 of our Constitution. It preserves Free Primary Education which provides basic access to all government primary and secondary school children. Many of these would not have the opportunity to learn to read or write due to poverty and loss of parents because of Aids, road accidents and gender based violence.

It is also evident in the current budget, that the Government is committed to accelerate academic achievements, competencies and skills. With regard to the allocations for the 2016/2017 towards Education, it is a delight to see a nominal increase of 13% in this critical sector.

**Honourable Speaker**

**Honourable Members**

There are, however, still concerns on the quality of education and the high number of pupils dropping out of schools, with no clear alternative access to acquisition of lifelong skills to enable them to find jobs. Unemployment, especially among the youth remains a major challenge to our development and social stability.

Through this budget, we must build on the on-going youth support initiatives to further encourage entrepreneurship, innovation and creativity of the young people. As a Government that cares deeply for the youth, skills development must be given priority to enable this group to be the dynamic drivers of growth and employment creation.

Youth are the nation’s hope, assets and successor for the future. According to religious scholars, good behaviour of youth today will reflect the future of the nation.

**Honourable Speaker**

**Honourable Members**

In conclusion, the Government, has succeeded in steering the country through a difficult period of domestic challenges. We have emerged resilient again. The economy continues to grow and we are putting in place the foundation for a faster and more inclusive growth in the years ahead. This is, therefore, a budget for the people. A budget that responds to the concerns of Namibians – the high cost of living, insecurity, unemployment and high levels of poverty.

But equally important, it is a budget that also lays a firm foundation for accelerated inclusive growth for a shared prosperity. I, therefore, urge Honourable Members and the Namibian nation at large, to join us in building the Namibian House we want.

**I thank you.**