Responses to the questions posed by Hon E.J. Dienda to our Minister on the gazetting the Biosafety Regulations.

Namibia ratified the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety in 2005. The protocol is an international agreement that aims to ensure the safe handling, transport and use of living modified organisms (LMOs) resulting from modern biotechnology. It was adopted on 29 January 2000 and entered into force on 11 September 2003.

The national instrument for implementing the Cartagena Protocol is the Biosafety Act, Act No 7, 2006. The Act gives powers to the NCRST to be the overarching body responsible for implementing the Biosafety Legal Framework. The NCRST was established in 2013 and the Biosafety Council was fully constituted on 16 September 2014.

The functions of the Biosafety Council include amongst other things initiating and managing consultation and review processes on the development of national strategies, plans, policies and programmes on biotechnology and biosafety in Namibia.

The Biosafety Council has drafted three sets of regulations that will deal with:

1. -Placing on the market of GMO (These are regulations that will guide the placing on the Market of GMOs (feed and food) where labeling, safe handling and transportation across borders, of GMOs.
2. -Environmental Release (field trials)
3. -Contained Use of GMO (lab work)

These regulations have undergone extensive review by both stakeholder and technical staff, starting from September 2014 and are in the process of being finalized. The Biosafety Council has engaged widely in consulting all relevant stakeholders over the past years in the process of developing the regulations. These regulations are now at the final stage and ready for submission to my office in November 2015.

On whether 90 percent of Maize in Namibia in Genetically Modified, there is no scientific data that has established this claim. However, the GMO content or percentage in any product suspected of being a GMO is determined by the source of its constituents.

For instance if the maize grain was sourced from farmers that grow GM maize then the content of the maize

meal/flour will be GM. In the same instance if the grain was mainly sourced from farmers who grow conventional maize then the larger percentage of the grain will be non GM grain. If the country of origin of the products has approved a particular GM variety of maize, the country of origin does not discriminate a conventional crop from a GM crop and will sell them together as maize grain to a potential buyer.

Given that approximately 50% of our Maize is sourced from South Africa and South Africa is known that almost 80 % of South Africa's Maize in GM Maize, its presence in Namibia cannot be denied.

However, GMO products undergo rigorous regulations which require them to be tested at all levels of development. Both environmental risk assessments and food safety assessments are carried out by product developers and then verified by regulatory bodies of different countries for approval in the country were products are to be marketed. Many countries base their food safety testing criteria on internationally accepted guidelines such as the *Codex Alimentarius* which has set out some guidelines and principles when evaluating food derived from biotechnology.

The guidelines advise the use of a multidisciplinary approach for assessing safety which takes into account both intended and unintended changes that may occur in the GM plant or in the foods derived from it, using the concept of substantial equivalence, i.e. testing to see whether the GM crop is "substantially equivalent" to its conventional counterpart. This is to test whether it is "not less safe than its substantial equivalent". The knowledge on safety of GMOs is based on scientifically sound data currently available. As of date there is no undisputed evidence that the products are not as safe as their conventional counterparts and several countries including South Africa have approved many GMOs for consumption basing their decisions on acceptability of perceived risks at the time of approval within their biosafety legal framework.