



THE RALLY FOR DEMOCRACY AND PROGRESS (RDP)



P. O. Box 81500, Olympia, Windhoek * Tel/Fax: +264 61 255973 * Fax2E-mail: +264 (0) 88615773
Email: rdpheadoffice@gmail.com* 18 Schölein Street, Windhoek West * Website: www.rdp.org.na

MAIDEN SPEECH BY HON. HISKIA KENNEDY SHEKUPAKELA

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INTRODUCTION

Honourable speaker,

Honourable members,

It is perhaps prudent that I first and foremost extend my unwavering appreciation and gratitude to you Honourable speaker and the Honourable members of this August house for the warm reception that I have been afforded since my arrival in the August house.

My transition into the house has been accompanied by new acquaintances and bonds of mutual respect - and I dare say friendship. It goes without saying that I have been made to feel right at home since my first day.

Honourable speaker, allow me, for the sake of protocol to personally introduce myself. My name is Hiskia Kennedy Shekupakela. I hail from the Kavango regions, both East and West. I say both Kavango regions because I have dwellings in both two regions. I am here today in the

house on the ticket of The Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP) replacing my colleague and the President of the party, Honourable Mike Kavekatora who recently decided to take up other RDP assignments.

Honourable speaker Honourable members, it would be a grave injustice to the party, to this house and the entire Namibian Nation if I fail to recognize and applaud Honorable Mike Kavekatora for his outstanding contributions through robust discussions and invaluable actions towards uplifting the social stance of the people of this great Nation. He has undoubtedly shown all of us through his selfless acts to vacate the seat that as leaders, it is necessary to pave the way for a transition in leadership and representation – which as we all know is a dreadful predicament in Africa where the vast majority of leaders hinge on to positions. It was not an easy decision to make given the perks and privileges that come with such a position. Mike Kavekatora is, but one in a million of the people that are bold enough to take such a brave decision.

This move by honorable Kavekatora is a good example that we can all emulate from. There are quite a number of qualified, capable and strong-willed comrades in our respective parties with outstanding ideas that would for all intents and purposes serve the nation greatly. You must start thinking in that line dear Honourable members. Some of you in this house have honestly overstayed your terms of meaningful contributions and have become complacent in your roles and positions. There is life after this honorable members.

Honourable speaker, Honourable members, it is indeed a privilege for me to stand before this Honourable house and indeed before the nation at large to share my hopes and aspirations of a prosperous Namibia where all citizens are afforded a chance - and rightly so - to feel at home and be given a chance, to benefit from the resources of their mother land. Honourable speaker, Honourable members, I understand very well that the functions and powers of this house as granted by the Constitution of the Republic under Article 63 Sub article(1) are, "to make and repeal laws, to sustain the peace, order and good governance, particularly in the best interest of the people of Namibia".

What we can fundamentally deduce from this constitutional provision is, the primary task that befalls us to raise and table issues that are affecting the socio economic aspects of our people. We are, but an extension of the voices of the masses - a vessel for the hopes and dreams of the downtrodden ordinary people - the safeguard of the tomorrow that Namibia was founded on. This, comrades, is what this house ought to represent.

STANCE OF THE PARTY REGARDING THE PLIGHT OF THE UNEMPLOYED YOUTH.

Honourable speaker, Honourable members, since my appointment to this house, I have been receiving calls and visits from so many citizens from all walks of life. Young people who are eager to see a transformation and a shift in the economical climate of the country. These young people have shared their experiences and difficulties. It should be borne in mind that none of these struggles that they alluded

to are new to anyone in this house. Despite that, I will still reiterate their plight and raise these points for the Government to look into.

Honourable members, the reality on the ground is that the vast majority of our people are living hopelessly at the moment.

There is no faith or trust in the administration of the government of today or much less this house, in so far as the question of addressing their struggles is concerned.

This is evident in the increase of suicide cases especially among the youth, and particularly our young men. Our fathers and brothers.

The masses feel that Government of today is not doing enough, to address their plights, despite promises of shared prosperity since the very dawn of Independence in 1990.

I am not the first, nor will I be the last to dissect the crisis of youth unemployment in the country. However, it is prudent that I share my sentiments and directly shine light on the failures of this Government to prioritize and decisively deal with the issue of unemployment, despite the enormous cries by the masses and many of the members in this House today. It is very shocking to say the least that whenever someone is talking about this issue especially from this side of the house, some members on the other side of the house would think that it is a mere political ploy to garner political points. This line of uniformed thinking is predominantly premised on the privilege that befalls many if not all members here- I further would dare say, from an irresponsible and ignorant citizen.

Honourable speaker, Honourable members, if we have to list the problems that we are facing as a country, youth unemployment will be

on top of that list. It is a ticking time-bomb and we all know it very well. As representatives of the masses out there, we must talk about it on a daily basis, we must come up with decisive solutions that can yield immediate positive results.

Honourable speaker, the country is faced with a dilemma of accommodating both skilled and unskilled youth in Namibia. Quite frankly, the statistics have proven that the youth we are talking of now are no longer those without skills, or a lack of education.

We are talking about thousands of graduates in various fields of studies. Young, capable individuals who are more than ready to show to the task and deliver.

To make it worse, the security forces has dared to silence the peaceful demonstrations of these young people of this country, who have done nothing more than to sensitize the government about their plights and struggles. Your response to their action is to detain and silence them rather than to engage them. We cannot turn a blind eye on the fact that the youth are turning to crime and all sorts of illegal activities for their survival. Do we blame them? No. The rate of crime in the country has sky-rocketed with the youth turning to stealing and selling illegal products, just for them to access the little that they can for their survival. Let this narrative not be construed as a con-donation of the ill practices that I am highlighting - however, one cannot steer away from the actions without addressing the causes first. The high crime rate in the country is a result of poverty and unemployment. This failure has left broken homes and pushed the masses in destitute.

Quite recently, in Rundu, criminals have resorted to targeting schools in broad daylight. Recently a teacher at Rudolf Ngondo Primary school who

went to withdraw money for a school program was followed by thieves from the bank up to the classroom and was robbed and assaulted there in the presence of kids. Grade 4 learners for that matter. One would not imagine the trauma, the scar that such an act has caused.

Again, do not misconstrue my message as a form of con-donation - we are against the criminal acts that have risen up in our midst - however, we must admit the fact that there is a root cause to this dilemma.

For the past weeks we are learning through the media that prostitution is now on the increase in Oshakati and I understand Rundu is on the cards. These practices were considered as a taboo in those communities before, but now it is practiced in the open, and people have no shame anymore because they are hungry. They are our mothers, our daughters and sisters who have resorted to prostitution as a means to provide for their children and to survive.

Honourable speaker, Honourable members, those are just few highlights of what we are becoming as a country. As much as Government claims that they are making efforts in addressing these challenges, I personally feel that more is expected from the public for the private sector and Government to create opportunities for employment. Namibia has enough resources for all her people but, the distribution of these resources is never balanced. Today we have few individuals that have become multimillionaires through corrupt Government tenders and schemes.

Honourable speaker Honourable members, while the Government is struggling to build more schools, hospitals and carry out many more government projects, the money is in the hands of few individuals that are now living lavish lifestyles while the majority are languishing in

poverty all in the name of tenders. Some members of this Honourable house have become signatories of this scheme of tenderpreneurs, benefiting at the peril of the poor in this country.

Honourable speaker, Honourable members, we need to be serious and Namibia must act now! There should be a political will to address the challenges that are affecting our people.

We cannot continue to be ignorant while the livelihood of our people is in a mess. These tenders worth millions that are given to individuals, year in and year out should be reviewed and conducted in a more honesty and transparent manner.

What is the logic of enriching one individual while the rest of the people are reduced to being mere spectators salivating in poverty? We now have thousands of youth that have graduated at Vocational training centers and are still being trained. These young people are qualified as brick layers, carpenters etc. They are unemployed with those skills. I have learnt recently that over 4000 artisans in Omusati Region formed an association with the aim of volunteer in the community to renovate especially government buildings like schools. These young people are just given a token of appreciation from the school funds. The next thing you hear is that an individual who is well off and well connected is given a government tender for the very same work that these young people are qualified to do. These tenderpreneur do not have even experience or the know how in construction.

Honourable speaker, Honourable members, this Omusati initiative needs to be recognized, supported and facilitated by government and be introduced in all the regions. You will see that government will even save millions of dollars because these tenders will be fairly awarded and prices will not be inflated.

I strongly feel that government tenders especially for construction should be reviewed and be awarded to these groupings of the youth well facilitated in all the 14 regions.

Government has wasted a lot of money in these inflated tenders and if this practice is not halted, the consequences will be grave.

Honourable speaker, Honourable members, I have only used the tenders for construction as an example but, all forms of tenders whether it's for the distribution of condoms, supplying of pharmaceutical appliances or for hiring private securities. All these things are a **scam** comrade, aiming at looting the government coffers and they must be brought to an end.

Honourable speaker, Honourable members, I strongly believe that there are plenty of solutions to youth unemployment. I personally believe that government is too reluctant to address these challenges. There must be a political will to address the crisis and the time is now.

Honourable speaker, Honourable members, while I am on this very important topic of the youth, allow me to touch on the SMEs. The Government is encouraging the youth to start their small businesses and enterprises under the beautiful concept of SMEs. The aim is to create employment for themselves and for others. It is a known fact that, one requires a sustainable form of financial assistance to ensure that their

business or initiative runs smoothly. The arrival of the SME Bank in 2012 came as a solution and many of our young people flocked there to secure loans. Up to date the bank has vanished without a trace and the necessary authorities have failed to hold those responsible for its closure accountable.

Due to the economic crisis since COVID-19 epidemic, It has been very difficult for these young people to pay back the loans or alternatively to find another stream of funding.

Now the SMEs liquidators are on the neck of these debtors with threats and pressure to reposses their assets. What is the government stance in this matter? Why can't the Government intervene to make it possible for these young people to continue with the business by adjusting the original terms and conditions of the loans given the circumstances?

Honourable speaker, Honorable members, what will happen to the workers that are employed by these small companies if their assets are repossessed? I understand that it is a normal practice in handling these kind of dilemmas, however as for a responsible and active government, difficult times call for different approaches. We call for the Government to intervene in this matter and bring lasting solution. We have our people whose livelihood is under threat and here we are, folding our hands?

Honourable speaker, Honourable members, the state of our education system topic is becoming boring now. So many things have been said about the state of Education in the past, especially the shocking results for the academic year 2022 for the National Senior Secondary Certificate Ordinary (NSSCO). The high failure rate that is on the increase Honourable members should not be a surprise. The Ministry of Basic Education and schools in particular, are faced with a lot of challenges

that are clearly contributing to the high failure rate. Challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, the teacher learner ratio as stipulated in the education Act is no longer applicable. This year over 1000 learners in the Kavango East region had to start their academic year one month later due to the lack of space for them in the schools.

At the moment, they have temporarily been accommodated in tents where we all know it is not conducive for quality teaching and learning to take place.

Honourable speaker, Honourable members, the serious shortage of learning materials in schools is another issue. There are few materials to facilitate and implement the newly introduced curriculum especially for the Advanced Subsidiary Level. The Universal Primary/Secondary Education funds provided to schools are a drop in the bucket. The situation left the schools with no choice than to beg parents to buy textbooks and contribute to the school finances. This makes the free education a serious joke.

Honourable speaker, Honourable members, at the same time we are expecting these tasks to be executed by the teachers who are demoralized, frustrated and they find themselves in such environments. This is the sector where employees are so frustrated and the morale is low, because of their income that does not match the basic living standards for today. Teachers that do not get the opportunity to be promoted as Heads of Departments or Principals have to manage those low salaries for over 30 years until they retire. Majority of the teachers feel that the WASCOM recommendation of 1996 was more practical than the revised salary structures. At least there should be a difference in salary structures of senior teachers from the newly appointed teachers.

It is not only the teachers that are in this mess Honourable members. We have a situation where a Principal of less than 50 learners have the same salary as that of a principal managing over a 1000 learners or more.

We have a situation of the Inspectors of Education that are in the same salary structure as the Principals who are their subordinates. These things are happening right under the nose of the lawmakers and are left unattended to.

The factors I mentioned and many more Honourable members, make it so difficult to manage the schools and give us good results.

Honourable speaker, Honourable members, allow me now to touch on the sector that is very dear to my heart. That is Agriculture particularly farming. Farming is the back bone of any country because it is where food is produced. I strongly believe that Namibia with its vast land, has the potential to produce enough food for her people and attain a surplus.

Farmers in Kavango East and West in particular, should applaud the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform for allocating pieces of land to farmers. I must indicate that most of those farms are deep in land, and if you go there today you find that there is little development or none in most of those farms. This is so because farmers have no off road vehicles strong enough to drive in the thick sands that stretches over a 100 kilometers. These farmers are finding it difficult even to transport their animals to the market because of poor road infrastructure.

Honourable speaker, Honourable members, I suggest there should be a way to support farmers by improving their roads so that they can easily access their farms.

Another thorn in their flesh for the Kavango East and Kavango West farmers at the moment is the harvest of timber on the farms. This exercise was just halted abruptly while some farmers who were issued with permits could not even start with the harvest.

The Ministry of Environment and Tourism should revisit the issuing of permits so that farmers can access these resources and be able to bring necessary developments in the area.

CONCLUSION

Honourable speaker, Honourable members, I wish I could touch on all the challenges but time will not allow me.

It should be borne in mind that we are the change that we want to see. We will fail ourselves, our people and this great nation when we turn a blind eye to the struggles of our people. I for one, will not lay idle and watch the injustices unfold before our very eyes. We will hold you accountable and ensure that you deliver on your sworn promise as Government and members of this August house.

Honourable speaker, Honourable members, there has never been a time greater than now to deviate from our selfish desires and gratify our stomachs and our own pockets. The principles upon which this great country was established of equality and fairness should be echoed now, more than ever.

I thank you.