

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Motivation by Hon. L.N Hamata (PDM) regarding the Motion to discuss the issue of family separation due to redeployment

September ~~18~~ 2023

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Thank you, Hon. Speaker,

1. I stand before this esteemed House today to address a matter of utmost urgency and moral responsibility—the profound and devastating effects of redeploying spouses to different regions or towns within our beloved Republic of Namibia.
2. When I initially presented this motion in this esteemed house, many members found themselves questioning why I would bring forth a motion of such significance, given that I am not married. I am certain that some even pondered whether it might be another lofty dream akin to granting one million dollars to every Namibian. **Honorable Speaker**, I imagine you, too, may have wondered about the essence of this motion.
3. Human beings transit through two main civil events in their lifespan that transform their civil status permanently; birth and marriage. Certainly, marriage is a key event in an individual's life.

Honorable Members,

4. A long distance marriage can be described as a marriage where the spouses live in separate geographical locations in kilometres, countries or continents for

short or long durations. Long distance marriages as a result of redeployment of spouses is at the centre of this Motion.

5. The term distance is also applicable to the emotional state of a relationship. Long distance marriages are fragile, delicate and a handle with care units where members are at crossroads in many aspects of their lives especially when making critical decisions. Mishandling of issues in these families can lead to irreparable damage to members. When a spouse is away for a long period, roles are reversed and this has an impact on all aspects of a family. One of the few examples on how this has an impact on all aspects of a family is that, ongoing investment projects stall or take long to be completed due to unprecedented flow of funds.
6. Finances play an integral part on a family in the provision of basic needs and for investments. The methods of creating and spending finances increase responsibilities such as maintaining two homes, which further strains the family finances and becomes a source of family conflicts. Inadequate resources may lead to spouses engaging in unconventional means of searching for finances such as: fraud, among others. Adequate finances accrued from investments, can be a source of self-esteem to the individual or to the family members.¹

Honorable Members,

7. A critical function of the family is parenting, which must be undertaken by the parents. The family unit also serves as a correctional institution where deviation from family norms is shunned and desirable behavior encouraged. Families

¹ Wright and Roberts, 1997.

operate as miniature courts where sanctions for negative behavior are meted on the individual.²

8. This is because children learn by observing their parents. The absence of a parent leads to formation of dysfunctional families. These defective families produce four types of children namely: family Hero, who possesses negative traits such as being a workaholic, the Scape goat who is hostile, gets angry easily as well as displaying other negative traits, Lost child who is withdrawn and a loner, Mascot who is fragile, immature and needs a lot of protection and assurances from the parents³.
9. The impact on our children is profound and deeply concerning. They endure immense stress and face disrupted development, as the absence of one parent due to redeployment forces them to navigate complex emotional terrain. This separation leaves them exposed to the specters of violence, exploitation, and abuse, threatening their well-being and jeopardizing their futures.
10. Equally important, the practice of redeployment of spouses to different regions or towns has far-reaching consequences for our communities and churches. It strains the very foundation of the family unit, which is the bedrock of our society. When marriages are subjected to the challenges of long-distance living, the holiness of the family is eroded, affecting our communities and the social fabric of our nation. Churches bear witness to the disintegration of family bonds and the suffering of their congregants, as they strive to provide solace and support to those torn apart by these policies.

² Saccombe, 2005.

³ Gichinga, 1999.

Honorable Members,

11. If you've been, or are in a long-distance marriage, you're certainly not alone.

Distance in a partnership can be one of the most challenging things a couple can go through, but the reality is that many people will find themselves in long-distance marriages at some point or another.

12. Individuals enter marital unions at the stage of intimacy versus isolation (20-35)

years.⁴ In marriages, couples live together geographically and emotionally and settle down to child bearing and parenting while still progressing with their careers.

13. This is true for majority of Namibians especially those working in the banking,

education, health, judiciary, and safety and security sectors. Reassignment, coupled with the individual need for self-improvement compels individuals to travel to other towns, or regions creating long distance marriages.

14. The group of people who mostly get redeployed to other regions is the

uniformed personnel (mostly defence and police forces, immigration officers) on call of duty. While redeployment does not consider one's age, personal circumstances or years of service, most of these officers are young people with young families. What is more, the short period together robs the couple of the emotional connection necessary in laying a firm foundation for a family. The call to duty, therefore, separates the young couple temporarily in the duration of the assignment.

15. In our investigation of this matter, we have established, disappointingly so, that

some of these redeployments are used by senior managers in public institutions to 'deal with' some of their subordinates who proof to be difficult in one way or

⁴ Meier et al, 1983.

the other. In some instances, we have heard that some redeployments occur because a senior person wants to have romantic access to the spouse of his subordinate, thus sending them to far flung places. Society should no longer tolerate this, however small the scale at which these atrocious acts are happening. This is a crime against humanity, against the constitution which protects the foundation of marriage and against the institution of marriage and itself.

16. This Motion is informed by evidence-based reasoning. Redeployment comes at a cost. Specifically, the absence of a spouse impacts negatively on a couple's sexual relationship where (81%) of respondents surveyed in one of the African countries –Kenya–were sexually unfulfilled, (72%) were emotionally distant with the absent spouse while (45%) cited the existence of infidelity in the family.

17. Children who are significant members of a family are equally affected by the absence of a parent. This is evidenced by (83%) of the respondents saying that children were emotionally distant with the absent parent, (56%) respondents said that children lacked models while (35%) of respondents said that children became depressed. Family finances (51%) was also an aspect of a family affected by absence of spouse /parent as recorded by the respondents.

Honorable Speaker, Honorable Members,

18. Families that are affected by redeployment often find it difficult to navigate a new life, or even worse, save their marriages. It essentially takes 'a lot' to protect a long-distance marriage. To be more specific, families must possess the following virtues to survive:

- a) trust;
- b) honesty;

- c) open communication and;
- d) integrity.

19. How do you ensure the above virtues exist in a long distance marriage when the same virtues are not even popular among couples who live together? Telling people that if they are not prepared to be left alone, they should never get married, will simply not help anyone. This is inconsistent with our Constitution which makes provision for the family being the natural and fundamental group unit of society, and is entitled to protection by society and the State.⁵

20. Human beings get married for varied reasons such as for companionship, emotional support, sexual fulfilment and child bearing. Is it not true that sexual fulfilment has a crucial role in a couple's life as it cements a couple's relationship? More importantly, women have a definite child bearing time frame (15-49) within which procreation must take place. Other individuals get married to acquire status in society and as proof of adherent to societal norms.

21. Whereas the issues highlighted above are not necessarily unique to families in long distance marriages, the absence of a spouse creates unique challenges to these families, hence this Motion.

22. A couple's relationship is crucial in providing companionship; friendship, emotional support, sexual fulfilment, key ingredients to a healthy marriage. Through sexual relationship, consummation of marriage and procreating occurs. Spouses also receive emotional fulfilment from each other through value recognition, companionship, praise, support in household chores,

⁵ Article 14(3) Constitution of the Republic of Namibia.

accomplishing tasks and contributing ideas for family investment and welfare.

Some of these ingredients to strong families lack in long distance marriages.

23. Being a single parent forces one to play the role of the absent parent be it a single mother doubling as a father or a single father sometimes playing the role of an absent mother. Redeployment must not be one of the single-parenting enablers.

24. As regards children, parenting is a full time job that requires parenting inputs from both parents. The absence of a parent for a prolonged period, therefore, leads to varied developmental gaps in children that include antisocial behavior, absenteeism and delinquency. **Honorable Members**, lack of mentorship from a father, especially to teenagers results in identity crisis and poor negotiation of developmental milestones.

25. According to Sigmund Freud,⁶ who was an Austrian neurologist and the founder of psychoanalysis, child-parent relationship at the phallic stage (3-6years) is critical to the modification of a child's behavior. Parents left behind with the children, handle their needs single handed, and get overwhelmed by the children's demands that range from provision of basic needs, school matters and their emotional needs. Children in a long distance marriage experience a form of single parenthood since they are left under the care of one parent for many years. This leads to strong relationships with the available parent and estrangement with the absent one.

26. What's worse, families in long distance marriages require additional finances since they have to maintain two homes. In the event of double-household expenses, the family finances get strained leading to unconventional means of

⁶ Ibid.

wealth creation. These problems weaken the couple's relationship, family cohesion and create emotional distance among members.

Honorable Speaker,

27. The foregoing factors often impact on the marriage institution negatively.

Couples often face issues and challenges arising from their diverse family norms, backgrounds, social economic status, personality and individuals' perspectives to life. Couples living together may equally get into conflicts resulting from their subjective view on issues.

28. However, since they live together, they have an opportunity to resolve their issues amicably as soon as they arise. They are also in a position to make critical decisions relating to investments, child bearing, etc.

29. In light of these profound concerns, I implore this honorable House to take decisive action to protect our families. Let us explore innovative policies that safeguard the well-being of spouses, children, and the holiness of marriage. I call upon our government to consider alternatives to the practice of redeployment that prioritize family unity and economic stability.

30. It is my fervent hope that this House will recognize the urgency of this matter, the economic hardships endured by families, the emotional turmoil faced by spouses and children, and the strain on our churches and communities. Together, let us forge a path towards a more compassionate and equitable approach, one that ensures the well-being of all Namibian families and the preservation of our cherished values.

31. In conclusion, we cannot turn a blind eye to the devastating consequences of redeploying spouses to different regions or towns within our nation. We must

act with conviction and urgency to protect the holiness of our families, the future of our children, and the strength of our communities.

Honorable Speaker, Honorable Members, this Motion seeks to put forth the following recommendations:

- a) *Workplace Deployment Policies:* Encourage employers to implement policies that minimize the need for long-distance deployments of spouses. This could involve rotation schedules, job-sharing options, or prioritizing placements that keep families closer together.
- b) *Family-Friendly Employment Practices:* Implement family-friendly employment practices that allow spouses to maintain their careers while staying closer to each other, such as remote work options, flexible scheduling, and on-site childcare facilities.
- c) *Tax Incentives:* Provide tax incentives or financial benefits to employers who actively support couples in maintaining proximity during deployments. This could be in the form of tax breaks or subsidies for family-friendly work arrangements.
- d) *Public-Private Partnerships:* Foster partnerships between the government and private sector employers to develop programs that specifically address the challenges of long-distance deployments and provide support for affected families.
- e) *Counselling and Support Services:* Establish counselling and support services within workplaces to help couples navigate the emotional and practical challenges of long-distance deployments, with a focus on mental health and family well-being.

- f) *Legislative Support*: Review and amend [labor] laws to protect the rights of employees in such situations, ensuring that they have the option to maintain proximity to their families without risking their careers.
- g) *Research and Analysis*: Fund research activities to better understand the impact of work-related long-distance deployments on families and use this data to shape policies and support initiatives.
- h) *Family Reunification Programs*: Develop programs that support the reunification of families after long-distance deployments, including assistance with housing, childcare, and job placement for the spouse returning from deployment.

I thank you, and I so move.