

MAIDEN SPEECH BY HON. MARTHA NAMUNDJEBO-TILAHUN

Honorable Speaker, Honorable members

I rise, and at long last make a contribution in this August House of the people. I make this statement fully aware that the people of Namibia have invested in us their hope, their trust and their aspirations. The people have done so with the confidence that the laws we make are for them, on their behalf and to the benefit of all Namibians irrespective of political affiliation, ethnic or economic status. We do so because, we are servants of the people. I speak therefore as a servant of the people and as their daughter.

Most specifically, I remember that in the 1989 elections my late father was 56 on the parliamentary list of SWAPO Party. He could not enter this August House because our Party did not garner enough votes. It was only about 45 seats. Thirty years later therefore, SWAPO Party has rose to over 77 seats during the 2014 Parliamentary Elections. That is how my turn came about and that is how I am finally here.

I might only be here for a short while until the lifespan of this term comes to an end. However, it matters not much how long I will be here. What matters is what I will have to say and what I will do here for on behalf of the Namibian people. Therefore, I believe it matters what I have to say here and now.

Honorable Speaker, Honorable members

It is no secret that our economy has been registering negative growth over the past three years or so. This contraction in the economy has caused severe socio-economic challenges in our society including closure of several businesses in various sectors of our economy, increase of unemployment especially for the youth, and increase in poverty. I know this from my little experience as a businesswoman in Namibia.

I have taken note of both H.E. President Geingob's New Year Message and a Statement on the opening of Cabinet. The State President laid out what I believe is his vision to revitalize our economy, hinted strategic actions to put in place measures such as downsizing Cabinet, appointment of skilled cadreship, equitable distribution of the fish quotas to include the 14 regions, addressing mismanagement as well as corruption, deliver services to the public without fail and developing innovative activities to address climate change.

As members of parliament, I believe that this is the right direction which our country should take and I will fully support implementation of these actions.

Honorable Speaker, Honorable members

As lawmakers, we have an obligation to exercise our oversight function in as far as compelling the Executive Arm of our State to implement suggested bold interventions which will stimulate economic activities and generate positive growth in our economy. At this critical time of severe economic depression in our country, our Legislature will fail in its duty if it does not hold special sessions dedicated to support the Government to speedy revival of our economy by providing sound advice to the Executive on the specific interventions which are required to achieve sustained economic growth.

It is important that we end the blame game and begin to work hand in hand as lawmakers, Executive, private sector and all other key stakeholders in our economy including individual citizens of this country. If we continue on a “them and us” path, it will take very long to get this economy fixed. We can also not afford over-politicizing our economic challenges unless if we are not genuine about our patriotism and commitment to serving the Namibian nation across the political divide in this house in particular and in our society in general. There is no option to unity of purpose as we face a common enemy in the form of unemployment, poverty, ignorance and all other ills facing our society.

While we were elected to this august house on the tickets of different political parties, we must never forget that we are, first and foremost citizens of this great country and representatives of all the Namibian people. Our lawmaking and conducts must therefore be guided by the needs of our people and the desire of those who elected us to shape a better future for them and the successive generations to come.

Mr. Speaker, Honorable members

In addition to our role as lawmakers, we have responsibility of educating and skilling the Namibian population especially the youth. We cannot expect our youth to create or take advantage of opportunities if they are not provided with adequate skills and support to do so. It is our duty to ensure that Namibia succeeds to transform itself into a highly skilled nation, able to innovate and produce world class products which can compete in the international markets. But it is a fact that innovation is mostly driven by skills and without adequate skills, we cannot expect our youth to help us in this respect.

It remains imperative that we actively engage the Namibian youth, who are the catalyst of progress; especially in the technology driven development areas of what is commonly referred to as The Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Let us therefore appreciate the pivotal role SOE's like the Telecom Namibia and Nampower play in ushering our nation into the now prevailing information age well equipped. The question is therefore of good governance.

I would fail in my duty if I omit to mention that the Namibian beef industry made history today yet again through Meatco, by sending off its first 25 tons of quality beef consignment to the United States of America. Such a landmark launch followed in the footsteps of another launch for the Chinese market last year which was supported by our Deputy Prime Minister and Honourable MP's. I would therefore, like to congratulate Namibia for being the only eligible African country to export Beef to the aforementioned countries.

Honorable Speaker and Honorable Members,

At this juncture, I would like to support the import of dairy products control bill under discussion. The proposed legislation to control imports of dairy products into Namibia is long overdue. The line ministry is therefore commended for this initiative.

With this bill, we will ensure that Namibians will consume high standard and affordable dairy products which are locally produced. I am aware that building such local industries will be difficult at first but with a certain degree of protection and support for those industries, there is no doubt it will thrive in the long run.

I would suggest that in addition to enacting this legislation, the Government comes up with measures to support our industries to diversify the production of milk and the manufacturing of dairy products in the country. I believe that more players will stimulate innovation in the dairy industry and create room for more growth of the industry. Most importantly it has the potential to create much needed jobs and self-reliance in terms of this sector.

Honorable Speaker, Honorable members

My father always told me that the value of any nation is measured by people in it. How they live and how they regard themselves in the past, present and the future. And above all how they value their traditional authorities. This August House of the people therefore has a unique position to be a custodian for how society values and accord respect to traditional leaders in line with the Council of Traditional Leaders Act 13 of 1997. I commend the fact that this August House

enacted this important legislation pursuant to the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia.

I therefore argue herein that from the South to the North; from the East to the West, our government and indeed our State must elevate traditional leaders and traditional authorities to be reliable partners and not adversaries or subordinate structures to be tolerated but not to be respected in accordance with the Traditional Authorities Act 25 of 2000. Traditional leaders, in this regard, are good advisers and not adversaries to Central Government.

It is a futile debate to have whether we are a Monarch or a Republic. What matters in my opinion is that we are seen to be teaching the future generations that our unitary State came about because of the foundation laid by fearless nationalists and traditional leaders like Hosea Kutako, Hendrik Witbooi, Jacob Marengo, Mandume ya Ndemufayo, Homba Hauwanga, Iipumbu Ya Tshilongo, etc.

Finally, Honorable Speaker, Honourable Members, It is evident from the above that traditional leadership is a common feature in our country. It is also much so all over Africa and the world. In some countries like Ghana, Nigeria or Botswana the equivalence of Council of Traditional Leaders is called House of Chiefs which essentially is a post-colonial assembly, taking the form of either legislative or advisory but providing an important voice in upholding the democratic values of a country. There is an expression in Setswana which goes “**Kgosi ke Kgosi ka batho**” meaning a chief is a chief by the will of the people. In other words leadership must always be a reflection of the people.

Therefore, I propose, that Namibia also considers amending the Council of Traditional Leaders Act in order to make provision for legislative assembly which debates, harmonizes and reforms traditional practices in line with the Constitution. I believe that any society and indeed any country which does not accord great significance to its cultural and traditional roots is doomed to fail along the way.

God bless Namibia! Thank you for your kind attention.