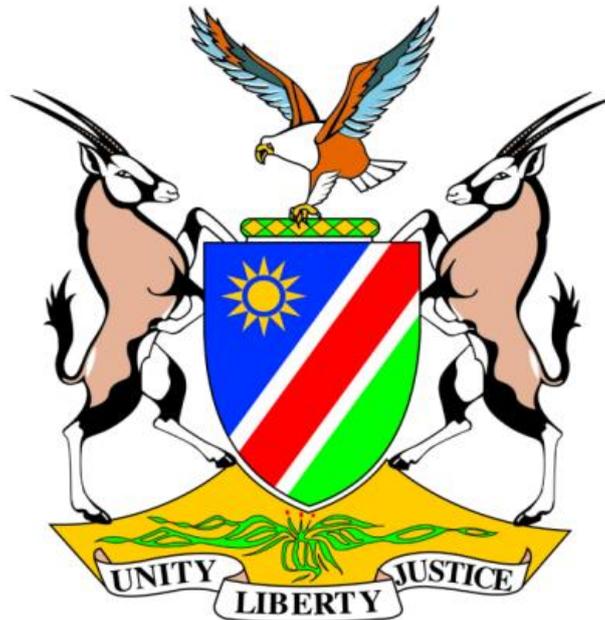


REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



STATEMENT

BY

**HIS EXCELLENCY DR. HAGE G. GEINGOB PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC
OF NAMIBIA
ON THE OCCASION OF
THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE 22ND ANNUAL MEETING OF THE COUNCIL
OF TRADITIONAL LEADERS**

AUGUST 19, 2019

**GOBABIS (GOBA LODGE AND REST CAMP)
OMAHEKE REGION**

Check against delivery

Programme Director;
Hon. Dr. Peya Mushelenga, Minister of Urban and Rural Development;
Esteemed Gaob Immanuel /Gâseb, Acting Chairperson of the Council of
Traditional Leaders;
Distinguished Traditional Leaders;
Honourable Ministers;
Honourable Members of Parliament;
Hon. Festus Ueitele, Governor of the Omaheke Region;
Your Worship Cllr. Liberius S Kalili, Mayor of Gobabis;
Hon. Regional and Local Authority Councilors,
Distinguished invited Guests;
Members of the Media;
Ladies and Gentlemen,

What is culture and what is its importance? Culture is one of the most integral foundations of our Namibian House. Culture gives our people a connection to social values, beliefs, morals and customs. It is the glue that binds us as inhabitants of this house, allowing us to identify with one another and thereby cementing the unity that exists amongst us.

Cultural heritage provides us a sense of belonging and binds us to our ancestry, so that we can appreciate our common history as Namibian people.

Given this reality and the respect and reverence I hold for our traditional leaders, it is a great honour for me to officiate the opening of the 22nd annual meeting of the Council of Traditional Leaders; the definers, protectors and promoters of our culture and heritage.

Before I proceed, please join me in observing a minute of silence in remembrance of our traditional leaders who have departed from our midst during the past several months, among them Omukwaniilwa Immanuel Kauluma Elifas and Chief Seth Kootjie.

The absence of these pillars of our society and cultural heritage is dearly missed, but their impactful contributions to the vision of 'One Namibia One Nation' will continue to reverberate in all corners of our Namibian House.

Director of proceedings,

Pursuant to Article 102(5) of the Namibian Constitution and section 2(a) of the Council of Traditional Leaders, the Council has an important responsibility of advising the President on the control and utilisation of communal land in the country. This is a critical role given the centrality of the land question to the sustenance of our hard-won peace, stability and social harmony.

The Council of Traditional Leaders has since its inception served as an important symbol and source of unity in diversity. As traditional leaders, you have helped to shape the structure and foundation of our society. Through you, we are reminded that we are part of a history that defines our past, shapes who we are today and who we are likely to become tomorrow. You are therefore vital in underpinning our national identity.

As you are aware, last year in October, we held our Second National Land Conference, during which we, as a nation, took stock of and deliberated on the land question in an inclusive and peaceful manner.

These deliberations resulted in a series of recommendations that we need to implement. I wish to take this opportunity to renew my appreciation to our traditional leaders who attended and enriched the deliberations of the Land Conference.

As leaders and citizens, traditional leaders must play an active role in the implementation of the Recommendations of the 2nd National Land Conference and I hereby urge you all to do so, by working together with the Commission of Inquiry on the Ancestral Land Question.

Director of proceedings,

In addition to the land question, our country continues to face several developmental challenges.

Among these are the continuing economic downturn and severe drought situation, which has reduced food security and the livelihood of many of our communities, especially thousands of subsistence farmers. For the purpose of finding effective and long lasting solutions to these challenges, this calls for greater unity among us, so that all pull together in the same direction.

As you are aware, I have declared the drought situation as a national disaster and called for urgent Government and stakeholder interventions, including approval of an over N\$500 million drought relief budget, and voluntary financial contributions from those of us who are privileged to earn an income. Furthermore, just last week, I concluded a series of nationwide Town Hall meetings, in all 14 regions with Cabinet Ministers and other Government officials. These meetings gave me an opportunity not only to assess the extent of impact the drought situation is having on our communities, but also to converse with Namibians from across the country, young and old, to gain a clearer understanding of their wellbeing.

Having witnessed the plight of our people first-hand, I have concluded that fellow countrymen and women are in dire need of material assistance to overcome the current drought and economic downturn. In the spirit of our united Namibian House, we all, therefore need to stand in solidarity with fellow citizens, by sharing our resources with them where possible and complement Government's efforts.

I look forward to the contribution of the traditional authorities and leaders in whatever way, towards this noble course.

Director of proceedings,

It has been said that, if you respect yourself, others will also respect you. Respect begins at home with all of us, as we are all primarily responsible for our reputation and dignity. As leaders and our elders, we look towards our traditional authorities to guide us, as teachers of moral and ethical conduct.

It is therefore worrisome for me to continue to witness instances of factionalism and ongoing leadership succession disputes between communities and their leaders.

Furthermore, constant applications are being received for the recognition of new Traditional Authorities, Communities and Leaders; a situation which, if accommodated, may not only become financially unsustainable but also lead to further tribal divisions within the Namibian House.

We cannot have a situation where people suddenly want to establish distinct traditional communities and chieftainship, premised on personal motives, preference and ambitions, while all these years they have peacefully resorted under one traditional leader, sharing the same customs, values, language and culture without any problem. Where there are legitimate cases for recognition, facts should be established beyond doubt, based on thorough investigation.

We should all appreciate Government's priority, which concentrated on issues of nation-building and economic advancement, opposed to the unending tribal disputes, dissensions and quests for recognition.

In this regard, I am calling on all citizens, especially our elders and traditional leaders to uphold our traditional norms and customs, and avoid fuelling and planting seeds of division and dissent.

You are the torch bearers of our cultural norms and traditions, which have as their goal, the advancement of peace, unity and the welfare of the community.

I have always pointed out however, that we can disagree without being disagreeable. Compelled by a conviction that, "people go to war, when dialogue fails", I continue to advocate for inclusivity and dialogue whenever confronted by circumstances that foster uncertainty.

As I have often stated, "inclusivity spells peace and harmony, while exclusivity spells conflict."

As Head of State, I believe firmly in inclusive and constructive dialogue and applaud the Council and the Minister for ensuring the Council meets each year to deliberate on crucial issues pertaining to our traditions and the country in general.

I call on you, esteemed traditional leaders, to continue to work hand in hand with the Government, in deepening and strengthening peace, unity and inclusive development.

Equally, I appeal to Government Ministries such as the line Ministry and the Office of the Attorney-General, to speed up the conclusion of cases presented to them and not to allow these to be delayed for years. We must reduce and eventually eliminate Government bureaucracy and indecisiveness in dealing with matters of the public.

Buck passing, undue delays and uncaring attitudes should be rooted out from our civil service henceforth.

Director of proceedings,

The Government, through the Ministry of Urban and Rural Development, continues to support traditional leaders and authorities in numerous ways, including capacity building as well as the establishment of community trust funds as viable vehicles for mobilising and deploying resources to address poverty, and other developmental challenges faced by the communities at a micro level. I would like to see these trust funds operational and for resources provided either by Government or the community, to be fully accounted for and utilised for their intended purpose.

Traditional authorities and leaders also have a great role to play in the promotion and creation of conditions for the empowerment and protection of the rights and safety of our women and children in society.

I recognise and applaud the stance of the traditional leadership fraternity against gender-based violence and once again call on you to do more and continue to work with the Government and law enforcement agencies, in

rooting out violence, discrimination and crime in general. Do not allow, within your respective jurisdictions, the archaic cultural practices of child marriages and child labour which enslave our children to lifelong serfdom.

Rather identify such practices and vigorously discourage them, by bringing them to the attention of constituency councillors or the Governors in your regions, so as to ensure our children all receive education that will help them to become productive citizens of Namibia. Namibia is home to all of us and we have the right to live freely and safely in it.

As I conclude, I wish to refer to an African proverb that says; "Home is not where we live; home is where we belong."

We are building a Namibian House, for all Namibians to live in, because all Namibians belong in this house, as a birth right. It is the only home we know, it is the only home we have and therefore it is a home we should guard with utmost vigilance, as government, as traditional leaders, as subjects, as patriots and citizens of this God given land.

I trust that our elders and traditional authorities will continue to fulfil their essential role as pillars of the Namibian House, by safeguarding our customs and traditions, peace and unity.

It is now my pleasure to declare the 22nd Annual Meeting of the Council of Traditional Leaders officially open.

I thank you all.