



**Republic of Namibia**

**Keynote Address and Official Opening**

**of the**

**NALAO 18<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting**

**by the**

**Honourable Deputy Minister of Urban and Rural Development**

**Derek Klazen**

**March 13, 2019 in Henties Bay**

Honourable Governor of the Erongo Region – Honourable Cleophas Mutjavikua

Your Worship the Mayor of Henties Bay Councilor Hosabe /Honeb and other Mayors present

Honourable Councillors

Esteemed NALAO President Walde Ndevashiya and the NALAO National Executive Committee

ALAN and ARC Presidents (as represented by...)

Distinguished municipal professionals and other invited guests, presenters and sponsors

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am pleased to join you on this important gathering on the occasion of the 18<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting and Conference of the Namibian Association of Local Authority Officials (NALAO) that is being co-hosted by the Henties Bay Town Council.

Meetings and conferences like these provides an opportunity for local government practitioners to reflect on the emerging and current pressing issues and challenges that affect the local government sector. You have chosen a very appropriate theme for the times we are living in *“Inspiring Smart, Safe and Sustainable Cities: A Call to Action”*

I believe that local government is a vital sphere of government because they are the government closest to the people.

This is where the rubber meets the roads and our people gets access to basic services to experience government face to face on a day to day basis. Thus local authorities have a key role to play in national building and social cohesion of our people.

We have witnessed over the last few years how urbanisation has become one of the most powerful, irreversible forces in the world. In Namibia 2018 was a watershed year as the United Nations Urbanisation Prospects projected that in Namibia the urban/rural population is now at 50% each with the prospect that this will grow to 70% in 2030.

These developments coupled with the resolutions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Land Conference Resolutions on Urban Land and Housing issues demands from local authorities to rise to the occasion and position themselves to play a pivotal role in urban socio-spatial transformation and national development.

There is great potential that lies in all of us collectively to find solutions, if we are united in both will and effort to respond to the challenges that face local authorities. I am glad to note that you have always make it a practice to include councillors in your Annual Conferences and AGMs although I understand that NALAO is a platform for municipal professionals. This will go a long way in cementing mutual understanding and pave the way for stronger collaboration at the local level.

Since I took over the portfolio as Deputy Minister of Urban and Rural Development both my Minister and I have travelled around the country to familiarise ourselves with the situation on the ground and to hear your thoughts, dreams and challenges. I could see that there are many government officials who are fully committed and dedicated to their work. They spend countless hours in the service to our people. We acknowledge them and thank them for their loyal and patriotic service to the nation. I am sure we can continue to count on this reservoir of goodwill and selfless service as we work together towards “Smart, Safe and Sustainable Cities: A Call to Action” as the theme of your AGM and Conference suggests.

Over the last two years my Minister has been invited to launch the Strategic Plans by local authorities, most notably for Omaruru which the Minister launched in 2018 while yesterday I launched the Strategic Plan for Khorixas. I have been reliably informed that Gobabis had their strategic planning workshop during the last week of February. I also took note that this strategic planning exercises are with technical assistance from NALAO and I want to commend you for this. It is imperative for all local authorities to have clear strategic vision and plans to guide your operations and work. Even the Bible says: *“Where there is no vision the people perish...”* (Proverbs 29:18)

I believe that the pride and joy of any local authority should be to provide responsive, reliable services and to create an enabling environment where people can live, work and play as they improve their livelihood and shared prosperity. A functional municipality must get its basic services right, like the provision of water, sanitation, housing, electricity, parks and playground, land for social and business purpose, roads, refuse removals and other essential services. At the same time such a local authority must manage its finances prudently and efficiently. It must collect revenue and pay its bills. Vacancies must be filled by competent, experienced and knowledgeable managers and staff.

I am raising this issues because I continue to see that despite the fact that I have seen the good side of local authorities I have also seen the bad and the ugly side. We have also seen political issues that impact on governance and service delivery. Sometimes this include squabbles within local leaders and many a- times these are people in the same party and this affects governance and decision-making that affects the performance of local authorities. At times the interference of political leaders in the administration also makes it difficult for municipal officials to carry out their tasks and leads to unnecessary suspensions or constructive dismissals by frustrating a person to such an extent that he or she is forced to resign.

Now if you fail to resolve and manage conflict within yourselves as political and administrative leaders how will you be able to resolve tensions with the communities that we serve. I cannot see how political and administrative leadership that is constantly at loggerheads would be able to present a united front to the people. Obviously they would have nothing to offer in terms of service delivery or strategic vision for a better tomorrow to the people. I therefore implore all political and administrative leaders in local authorities to forthwith ensure that squabbles are dealt with constructively and peacefully.

It is unacceptable to sometimes note that some of the squabbles are relating to resources in the local authorities such as tenders arising from greed and corruption. We must stand together to root these evils from our local government sector. Over the last few years the Auditor General as well as the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Accounts has also spoken out strongly about the need for effective, clean and efficient financial management in local authorities. We need to see the urgency of reversing the pervasive trend of adverse audit opinions until we can see the substantive majority if not all local authorities getting an unqualified audit opinion.

I believe that if local government must change the municipal professionals and local political leaders like you, you must be in the forefront of that change. Change and transformation in the urban space is primarily in your hands. Thus modern day local authorities Smart City approaches where the latest technology must be used to improve efficiency and monitoring service delivery. ICT must be used to keep track of customer service issues and responsive services, tracking the balanced scorecard, stakeholder issues, community feedback etc.

We have a social contract with our people and we are custodians of the interest of our people. They must trust us through our actions and not only through what we say. Our President keeps reminding us that we are servants of the people and that we need to be committed to deliver on our promise. This is especially important during this year that has been declared by the President as the Year of Accountability.

This is even more important because over the next two years because in this year 2019 we are seeking a fresh mandate from our people through the National Assembly and Presidential Elections and next year we have to seek another fresh mandate for the Regional and Local Government sphere. Let us work together to fix our local authorities and in this way build Smart, Safe and Sustainable Cities.

I wish you all the best in your deliberations and trust that you will share the outcomes and conference declarations of this Annual Conference and AGM with my office.

It is now my distinct honour to declare the NALAO 18<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting Officially opened.

I thank you.