

## Social Cohesion for Nation Building!<sup>¶</sup>

Thank you, Mister Speaker,

As I take the floor to contribute to this motion, I would like to say that this is perhaps one of the most important motions being discussed in this House since I became a member. This motion implores of us to exercise some introspection and answer some fundamental questions:

1. In my action and deeds, am I contributing to making Namibia a better place?
2. Do we see the deterioration in our societal dialogue through our utterances which exhibit xenophobia, homophobia, tribalism and pure and utter disregard for the feelings of others?
3. What must we do, as national leaders, the representatives of the people constitutionally mandated,<sup>1</sup> to instill a sense of patriotism, national pride and hope in our people?
4. What do you sense as the strongest bond that keeps Namibia together? Is it our National Flag? Is it language? Is it culture? What is it?

These questions are in essence the core of the motion before us. I would like to thank the mover of the motion for its timely arrival and most humble of presentations. The content of the motivation, which I have re-read some multiple times, is very relevant to the youth who grapple with reconciling their modern collective interests, as well as to our elderly who must navigate modernity with their historical value systems.

Social cohesion is a matter for all, and before we begin to talk about it, perhaps we ought to ensure that we speak from one definition of the terminology. *Social Cohesion*<sup>2</sup> is defined as “the belief held by citizens of a given nation-state that they share a moral community, which enables them to trust each other.” *Social Erosion* apparently defines the decline of social cohesion, a situation in which “fewer citizens in a given nation-state having the belief that they share a moral community that enable them to trust each other.”<sup>3</sup>

The motivation of the motion speaks to the times of prejudice economically, socially and legally for the majority of our people. That our advancement was denied, did not mean we did not live lives and found time to smile and be merry, notwithstanding our appalling situations. Hence the motivator speaks of the order that existed in society. The respect for the elderly. The fact that as a child, I could be chastised by any elder who found me acting in an errant manner. In fact, I can testify that it has happened more than I want to admit it.

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<sup>¶</sup> Contribution of Sakeus E. T. Shanghala, MP to the motion of Hon. Ms. !Nawawes-Taeyele, MP in the National Assembly.

<sup>1</sup> Per Article 45 of the Namibian Constitution, “members of the National Assembly shall be representative of all the people...”

<sup>2</sup> Larsen, C.A. *The rise and Fall of Social Cohesion: The Construction and Deconstruction of Social Trust in the USA, UK, Sweden and Denmark*. (2013) Oxford University Press.

<sup>3</sup> *idem*.

There can be no illusions. It was indeed a time of deprivation, dehumanization and want for independence from a rule that was not welcome. That period can be characterized by a disregard for human rights. Citizens were not equal in their relations based on race.

There are people in this Chamber who have been on trains, in the cattle compartment where cattle was transported, because the cabooses reserved for black folks were just that – the cattle truck!

So pervasive was this segregation that even among the black communities, we were separated and we were numbered. OvaHerero people had Identity Documents numbered 6, the Nama people were 9 and AaWambo people had Identity Documents numbered at 11.<sup>4</sup> Our unique customs and cultures were used as tools to divide us, not to integrate us. Damara folk were assigned to stay in Damara Lokasie. AaWambo to Wambo Lokasie. WANAHEDA was their effort to show to the world that we were living happily together.<sup>5</sup>

Mister Speaker,

*One Namibia, One Nation* is more than a mere tool for the politician who could be addressing a gathering. It is a call to unity, borne from the depths of the souls of Africans, previously enslaved, subjugated by colonialism and divided by *Apartheid*.

The liberation struggle is well documented. I cannot do justice to it in a timed intervention in this August House. We all have access to the history that has since been written.

Then came Independence Day. If you were able to witness the Namibian National Flag being raised at the Independence Stadium on the eve of March 20 to 21, 1990 then you will recall what President Nujoma said:

As from today, we are masters of this vast land of our ancestors. The destiny of this country is now fully in our own hands. We should, therefore, look forward to the future with confidence and hope. Taking the destiny of this country in our own hands means, among other things, making the great effort to forge national identity and unity. Our collective security and prosperity depends on our unity of purpose and action. Unity is a precondition for peace and development.

I underscore the words from that extract which speak to the theme of the motion on social cohesion: land of our ancestors; confidence and hope; unity of purpose and action; peace and development. Just like that, on March 21, 1990 our *conscience collective* changed.

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<sup>4</sup> The complete list was: Blankes 1, Basters 2, Boesman 3, Caprivi 4, Damara 5, Herero 6, Kavango 7, Kleurling 8, Nama 9, Tswana 10 and Vamboe 11.

<sup>5</sup> It is an acronym for Wamboes, Namas, Hereros and Damaras.

“We have peace in Namibia” proclaimed a jingle on radio and suddenly, *One Namibia, One Nation* became a reality. Continued racist and regressive incidents aside, such as the incident at Onduri Hotel in Outjo,<sup>6</sup> the first 10 years, 1990 to Y2K<sup>7</sup> were golden years in the making of this nation, *One Nation*.

The policy of *National Reconciliation* propelled a mindset of a new conscience collective: we forgive, but we will never forget. Therefore, we did not hold public inquiries into the deeds of the past. There is a legal basis for this. Those returning to Namibia were weary that the country was still under the control of the *Boers*,<sup>8</sup> and were likely to arrive straight to the prison cells for having broken the laws by propagating SWAPO and liberation rhetoric. There were freedom fighters in prisons on political grounds who needed to be liberated and there were perpetrators of heinous and egregious human rights violations under the uniformed units of SWAPOL, SADF, SWADF and Koevoet. Therefore, the Administrator-General issued Amnesty Proclamations<sup>9</sup> to ensure that the process leading into Independence was smooth.

The 1982 Principles, Resolution 435 and these Amnesty Proclamations, embody some of the important hallmarks in the annals of our history that lay the foundation for the construction of the Republic of Namibia.

The reconciliation we enjoy today, is due to many of our people who have willingly decided to turn a page, for what can be gained from inquisitions into what brother did against brother, or what sister did against sister? The fascist colonial minority regime used our people against one another. They have left us here to grapple with our future, or to scramble the opportunity of shaping that future with stories about dungeons whilst we turn the other cheek to the atrocities committed by that regime.

Many of them have since been pardoned twice. First by the Amnesty Proclamations and thereafter at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa. The miracle of Namibia is when Koevoet members can sit across the President of an Independent Namibia at State House, or even in this House, prisoner across jailer.

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<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.klausdierks.com/Chronology/133.htm> last accessed on June 25, 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Investopedia describes this term as follows:

Y2K is the shorthand term for "the year 2000" commonly used to refer to a widespread computer programming shortcut that was expected to cause extensive havoc as the year changed from 1999 to 2000. Instead of allowing four digits for the year, many computer programs only allowed two digits (e.g., 99 instead of 1999). As a result, there was immense panic that computers would be unable to operate when the date descended from "99" to "00".

<sup>8</sup> Literally translated, the term means ‘farmer’ in the Dutch and Afrikaans languages. In the Namibian and South African contexts, the term ‘refers to the descendants of the proto Afrikaans speaking settlers of the eastern Cape frontier in Southern Africa during the 18th and much of the 19th century.’ It is in this former context that I use the term. [Wikipedia](#) last accessed on June 25, 2019.

<sup>9</sup> *Vide* Amnesty Proclamation, 1989 (AG No. 13 of 1989) published in the Official *Gazette* No. 5725 of June 7, 1989. Another one was issued by the AG weeks before Independence when it was clear that he had forgotten to include amnesty for the former members of SWAPOL, SADF, SWADF and Koevoet. See further Direction under the Amnesty Proclamation, 1989 (AG. No. 16 of 1989) published in the Official Gazette No. 5894 of February 9, 1990. Could it be that this was delayed until they assassinated Anton Lubowski?

As Namibia's young, we inherit a legacy of a peaceful oasis, Namibia, the smile of Africa. Land of the brave, home to the glorious and the victorious.

Mister Speaker,

Perhaps we were still in awe over our achievement of Independence. As the euphoria started to wane, we also started to realize that our leaders are actually not Gods. They can err. They can be corrected. They can be criticized. So we started voicing our opinion on various matters. Some of these opinions, were justified. Others, were not.

The hullabaloo over presidential travel is not a new thing. On June 11, 1991 Prime Minister Geingob, as he then was, had to defend President Nujoma's travels in the public domain.<sup>10</sup> The issue is a non-starter nor is it a novel one.

With our new-found freedoms flowing from Independence came internal migration. Particularly, rural to urban migration. Windhoek was occupied by 49 000 residents in 1971. Today, more than 320 000 residents reside in Windhoek's suburbs which are now over 30<sup>11</sup>in number. Katima Mulilo had 5 000 residents in 1978.<sup>12</sup> Today, over 30 000 residents reside there.<sup>13</sup> Namibians and foreigners from all walks of life have the freedom of movement and can reside and settle anywhere. A similar tale can be told of all of the towns and villages of Namibia. Indeed, with that type of movement comes the challenge of housing for all the residents. Yet we as Namibians are not unaware of this problem. It is receiving our attention. Both Government and private sector have embarked upon initiatives to bring down the cost of urban housing and make it affordable to the residents, mostly young Namibians seeking to eke out a living from their professions or services in the public and private sector.

The challenges have been substantial, yet it is a juggling act when you consider the priorities among the various priorities in every thematic sector of our socio-economic being. Hence the call that we should all do what we can to ensure that we pay our taxes and accept the penalties that come with late and non-payment. It is through this system that we can ensure that the engine of our economy continues to work. Only now are we tweaking the tax system to ensure that it caters for 100% of the population, when in the past, it only catered for less than 10% of the previously advantaged population. Yet since 1990, the SWAPO Party Government provides for everybody!

Honorable Venaani mentions in this House, no less, that certain parts of the South of Namibia, where there are mines and other economic activities, still have gravel roads, whereas places in the North of Namibia, now have gravel roads or tarred roads.

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<sup>10</sup> *idem*. That year, President Nujoma visited Angola during January 21 – 24, 1991, People's Republic of Congo during January 25 – 27, 1991, Cuba during March 1 – 7, 1991 and Tanzania during April 22 – 25, 1991.

<sup>11</sup> *Vide* Wikipedia last accessed on June 25, 2019 at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Windhoek>.

<sup>12</sup> *Vide* Wikipedia last accessed on June 25, 2019 at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Katima\\_Mulilo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Katima_Mulilo).

<sup>13</sup> National Planning Commission (GRN). *Namibia 2011 Population and Housing Census Preliminary Results* (Namibia 2011 Census). April 2012 at p. 57.

I wish to point out to Honorable Venaani, that Government has built roads all over the country and will continue to do so, to the benefit of all Namibians, irrespective of where they come from, where they reside, their cultural heritage, language or standing. There is no marginalization in Namibia. Do not make that mistake. As the great revolutionary Samora Machel once said, “for the nation to live, the tribe must die.” Long may we live to heed these lessons of the wise who came before us and sacrificed so much.

I therefore invite Honorable Venaani to rise above the pettiness of tribal undertones and to envision the Namibia we seek to leave the likes of young Honorable Muharukua, when we have long left this Chamber for him and those who would call him an elder in their times.

Mister Speaker,

The economic downturn we have experienced offers us the opportunity to strive towards efficiency and the equal access to the resources of the Namibian Nation. For what it has done, is highlight the inequality in our society. There is much work still to be done, and to be done efficiently, for as I am known to say, “you can throw money at a problem, and you do not necessarily solve it, it just becomes an expensive problem.”

We can arm chair critique all we want, yet I must say, some of the facts make Namibia look poised to coming out of this recession to become an economic miracle for Africa if we are prepared to think long term, and to think big.

The future belongs to those who prepare for it today. Those are the words of Malcolm X. May we all prepare for a prosperous and better future today, *One Namibia, One Nation, One Country.*

I began with questions for introspection. In closing, I shall do the same. Perhaps this way, each and every individual Namibian can interrogate his or her existence within the wider question of the Namibian collective conscience and what constitutes our collective conscience going forward, such that we may prepare for a better future. The freedoms we enjoy today, allow varying views on all matters including the freedom of speech and association.

However, we have to narrow the debate down to what constitutes the collective conscience in order to move forward effectively and efficiently as *One Namibia, One Nation.*

A consequence of the fundamental freedoms, fought for by SWAPO and other liberation movements across the continent, is that the public discourse will be robust and may not always lead to the concurrence of opinions. However, a mature discourse will result in the line being drawn at personal attacks, insults and the denigration of personal rights such as the rights to privacy and dignity on the one hand, and on the other hand, fair comment, criticism and opinion based on objective fact. At times, competing interests, the generational divide and at times, plain sensationalism have become prominent in our national discourse.

Mister Speaker,

I am not for one moment suggesting that we, public figures, shy away from criticism or the harsh realities many of our citizens find themselves subjected to. Accountability remains a cornerstone of good governance in fostering the trust required to achieve effective social cohesion for the benefit of all Namibians.

We need to ensure that as a collective, each and every citizen, contributes positively to social cohesion, including and perhaps particularly those in positions of power and influence, rather than fostering *social erosion*. We need not resort to undignified, malicious, disrespectful, false, defamatory and divisive language and discourse.

We must remember that the electronic foot print of our posts, tweets, articles and social commentary over the world wide web is visible to all, including those that seek to do business with us, invest and form perceptions of our nation as a whole. This great power of communication, in the electronic day and age, should be exercised with the appropriate degree of caution and responsibility. By the way, just so you are aware, the growing trend is that countries are requesting access to the social media accounts of applicants for study permits, work permits, visas and residency applications.

Take my advice, and you may differ with me, for you who see no end to the negativity in Namibia, who may want to travel elsewhere, to relocate or gain an education elsewhere, what you say and do can come back to haunt you. Before you blame Government or SWAPO, this is not what we are doing. I am merely informing you that this is what other countries are doing.

Remember, being young is not permanent. As a young old man, I am very much alive to the reality that I have another 15 to 18 productive years to go before I reach retirement age at 60, before I start retreating to the back benches and out of this House so as to allow a younger more energetic cadre to come to the fore.

One elder confronted me with an interesting perspective on the issue. She said, if you look to all the parastatals, they are being run by young Namibians, and they are in a mess, by and large. That may be the case, and I want to respond to my elder to say that those that are not competent, we can remove. No one can defend mediocrity.

Those that are competent, we must appoint more of them. Those who are not competent, let us remove them without fear or favor. The question is: must this only apply to young adults like myself, or for everybody, including the elders.

Mister Speaker,

The Greek say, “change is the only constant in life”, and *times, they are a-changing*.<sup>14</sup> Hence the social discourse must progress from the past into the future, shaped, determined and informed by our collective conscience.

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<sup>14</sup> Refer to the 1963 Bob Dylan song “*The Times They Are A-Changin*”.

Inevitably, uncomfortable questions will arise. These questions will form the subject matter of competing views, values and opinions. It is for us to ultimately resolve these questions in the collective interests, informed by our collective values, which evolve from our changing collective conscience.

Questions which this August may need to apply its collective conscience to, in the not too distant future, are questions such as:

1. Abortion;
2. The legalization and commercialization of cannabis;
3. Same sex marriages or unions; and
4. Polygyny and polyandry.

Mister Speaker,

I do not offer any opinion on these subjects. What I sought to do, is to unearth the reality, that sooner than later, the collective conscience changes from what it was in the past, to what is prevailing, which will shape our social cohesion or social erosion for the future. It is SWAPO Party that embodied that collective conscience in the past, and it will again be SWAPO that shall embody the collective conscience of all Namibians, which shall shape the future of Namibia.

As we march into the future, we are called upon to democratize the economy and provide access to broad-based economic opportunities, for all Namibians – for the previously advantaged, and especially for the previously disadvantaged, who have long been denied and continue to be denied access and the realization of their dreams by the inherited structural prejudices of the economy.

We are enjoined by our common future that each and every one of us must ensure that we leave no one behind, in the journey to the prosperous future which awaits us.

We must ensure that we seek every avenue to ensure that we remove every prejudice we had for one another.

As one African scholar has noted, Africans have managed multi-racial, multi-cultural and socio-economically diverse societies better than Europeans. Let us be the leaders in ensuring that the diversity which characterizes our Namibian Nation is celebrated, and not shunned. Although we come from villages across the country, let us be reminded that Namibia itself lives as part of a larger village, the global village. We must therefore be more welcoming of others.

Derogatory terms such as *labeba*,<sup>15</sup> *Mukweko*,<sup>16</sup> *Omuḥorotua*,<sup>17</sup> *Omukwanghala*,<sup>18</sup> *Muduni*<sup>19</sup> etc have no place here. We condemn them, and we reject them, here in Namibia. As per the SWAPO Party Constitution, retrogressive tendencies such as tribalism, ethnicity, nepotism, racism, sexism, chauvinism, regionalism and all other unpatriotic ideas should be combatted by all members of society and the Party! SWAPO is the people and the people are SWAPO. Period.

The capitalist, free market system and ideologies which were adopted around the world are not without their unintended consequences. One of them is the stark contrast between haves and have nots. Namibia too bears these hallmarks of this leftist economic policy in practice. This crass distinction is not only a product of our colonial history, but also of the economic reality of modern times. It is a reality that we are acutely aware of and it is a divide we must narrow. To the have's, your duty is to bridge the divide to a more just and equitable society. To the have not's I urge that the will to dream, married with the democratization of the economy and equal access to the economic opportunities will overcome the disparity and divide. A secure future is one where all Namibians can benefit from equal opportunities and seek to bring about social justice in our society.

The SWAPO Party Political Programme<sup>20</sup> was conceived in the full understanding of these structural inequities, and it is the basis, the attainment of social justice and equity, upon which it directs the political, economic, social, gender, health, environment, housing and other programmatic ideologies of the SWAPO Party in Government.

We must use these ideologies to dare dream of a Namibia 50 years from today! Let us ask ourselves: How will it look like? Will the things we care about today matter?

As I move to recommend that this motion be discussed and interrogated by academia, debated by civil society and the debate teams of university faculties and high schools across the country, by society at large, I urge that the public discourse is directed towards a more cohesive society under One Namibia, One Nation!

End.

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<sup>15</sup> Colloquial for an OshiWambo speaking persons in the Damara/Nama or KhoekhoeGowab.

<sup>16</sup> Colloquial for a San person in the Lozi language of the Zambezi Region.

<sup>17</sup> Colloquial for a San person in the Herero language.

<sup>18</sup> Colloquial for a San person in the OshiKwanyama, OshiNgandjela, OshiKwaluudhi and Mbalanhu vernaculars of the OshiWambo language.

<sup>19</sup> Colloquial for a San or other click language speaking person in the RuKwangali language of the Kavango Regions.

<sup>20</sup> Adopted by the First Congress of SWAPO in an Independent Namibia, December 6<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> 1991, Windhoek.