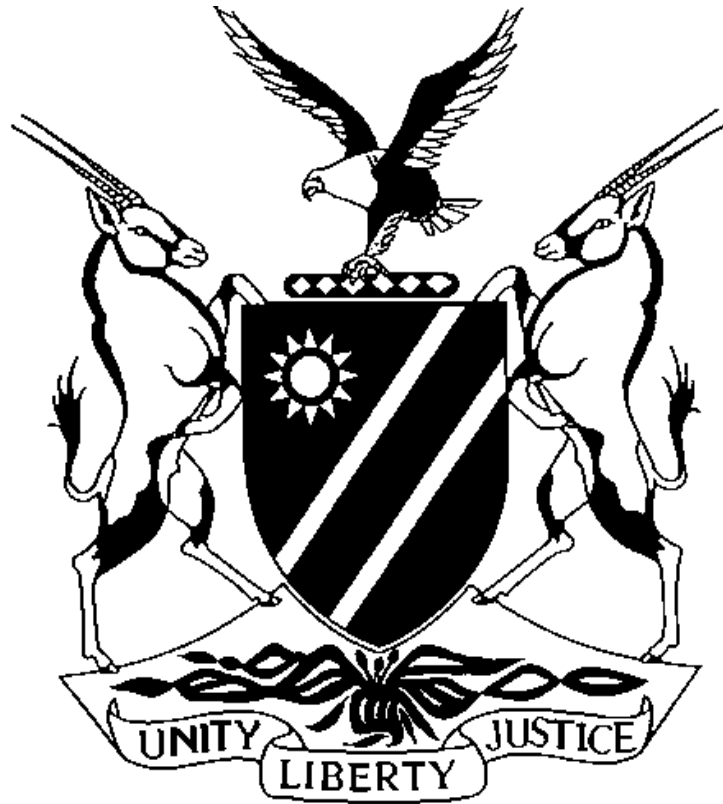


REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



**STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS
BY HIS EXCELLENCY
HIFIKEPUNYE POHAMBWA,
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA**

10 APRIL 2008

WINDHOEK

**Check Against Delivery*

Honourable Speaker of the National Assembly
 Honourable Chairperson of the National Council
 Your Excellency, Founding President and Father of the Namibian Nation, Comrade Dr Sam Nujoma,
 Right Honourable Prime Minister,
 Your Honour, the Chief Justice
 Honourable Deputy Prime Minister
 Honourable Dr Hage Geingob, First Prime Minister of the Republic of Namibia
 Your Honour, the Judge President,
 Comrade Dr Hendrik Witbooi, First Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Namibia
 Mr. Kandy Nehova, First Chairperson of the National Council
 Honourable Members of Parliament
 Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps
 Distinguished Invited Guests
 Members of the Media
 Ladies and Gentlemen,

I stand before this joint sitting of our august Parliament to fulfill an important constitutional duty of informing you, my compatriots, about the State of the Nation. Article 32 of the Namibian Constitution enjoins the President, after the tabling of the national budget, to inform the nation, through Parliament, about the policies and programmes of government in the preceding year as well as its plans for the new Financial Year. This occasion also serves another equally important purpose, namely, to reaffirm our commitment to the principles of accountability, transparency and good governance. The framers of the supreme law of the land, the Namibian Constitution, saw it fit to put in place a framework of checks-and-balances that regulates interactions among the three organs of State. This is one of the central pillars of our democratic traditions that have made it possible for our country to develop and build strong public institutions and systems.

We take pride in the fact that our constitutional democracy continues to flourish and function, providing us with the socio-political space to implement policies and programmes aimed at transforming our society and improving the living conditions of all our people through effective service delivery. Today, I intend to inform the Namibian nation about the implementation of Government policies and programmes during the 2007/2008 Financial Year, as well as our plans for the new Financial Year, covering the 2008/2009 period. The implementation of policies and programmes of our SWAPO Party Government is carried out within the context of our stated development priorities that are encapsulated in our National Development Plans, the 2004 SWAPO Party Election Manifesto and Vision 2030. These policy documents spell out the priority areas on which we must focus, while guiding the actions of both political principals and members of the civil service towards the achievement of our stated objectives.

Honourable Speaker
 Honourable Chairperson,

The period under review was characterised by intensified focus by our SWAPO Party Government to expand and improve service delivery in all priority areas. Particular attention was given to the plight of orphans and vulnerable children, the youth and school learners, the elderly, war veterans, the San, Ovaherero, Ovambo and the rural poor. Attention was also given to the provision of better health care, expansion of electricity with special emphasis to rural areas, promotion of sanitation with special focus to peri-urban areas, provision of potable water, expansion of infrastructure, employment creation and food production.

Contingency plans were also activated to assist those affected by natural disasters such as the drought and the floods.

The successful implementation of public policies must be supported by a vibrant and strong economy. Thus, specific attention must be given to different sectors of our economy in order to improve economic growth, support job creation initiatives and enable the small and medium enterprises to grow stronger and create more employment opportunities for Namibians.

At the international level, the global economy has seen increased levels of inflation, marked particularly by high prices of oil and food. These pressures have also been felt in the Namibian economy.

Namibia is working with other countries in the SADC Region to promote deeper regional economic integration and cooperation. In August last year, SADC Member States signed the Finance and Investment Protocol to facilitate co-operation and co-ordination in the critical areas of finance and investments. The aim is to diversify and expand the productive sectors, enhance inter-regional trade, achieve sustainable economic development and eradicate poverty.

We have been pursuing negotiations towards the SADC-EU Economic Partnership Agreement. Namibia raised a number of issues during negotiations and endorsed the Joint Text in December last year. We did this on the understanding that our concerns will be addressed through further negotiations as SADC member states prepare to re-engage the EU in negotiations once again.

Other initiatives aimed at promoting regional economic integration are the SADC Free Trade Area and the SADC Customs Union. Plans are under way to launch the SADC Free Trade Area during the SADC Summit in August this year. The region has also started with the establishment of the SADC Customs Union. In this regard, a Customs Union Trade Team has been established to carry the preparatory work forward. Our hope is to launch the SADC Customs Union in 2010. When implemented, these regional trade and investment configurations will bring many economic benefits to the people of our region.

Honourable Speaker
Honourable Chairperson,

We look back at the period under review with a sense of satisfaction regarding the pace of implementation of programmes and projects, as well as delivery of services by various Offices, Ministries and Agencies of Government.

Earlier in my statement, I reiterated our resolve to assist and improve the lot of the vulnerable groups in our society and other crucial constituencies such as the veterans of the liberation struggle, school leavers, youth, women, rural communities and the workers. I will now provide a catalogue of Government action across a spectrum of these areas during the period under review, while highlighting our plans for the new Financial Year.

The social sectors of health, education and housing, and provision of water and social grants have continued to enjoy Government attention. Programmes to combat the spread of HIV/Aids pandemic have been intensified. In this regard, voluntary testing is now being offered at 110 health facilities countrywide.

The prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission has been rolled out to 60 percent of public health facilities. The number of people who are eligible to receive state-funded Anti-Retroviral Treatment has increased and now stands at more than 41 000. The training of health workers and community counselors is ongoing to make the programme a success. I urge all Namibians who are infected by the virus to sign up and receive anti-retroviral treatment. Our Government has developed a national strategy to reduce incidents of maternal and newborn morbidity and mortality. Measures have also been put in place to address risks of communicable diseases such as cholera, malaria, wild polio and typhoid fever in the face of the present floods. The outbreak of cholera in some parts of northern Namibia is under constant surveillance. I applaud the work of all the teams involved in these efforts as well as the co-operation of the community. This has resulted in relatively low rates of fatalities.

In order to expand access to health care, new health facilities, particularly clinics have been built in our rural areas. Our Government has also intensified training programmes for health care professionals in conjunction with our development co-operation partners such as Cuba, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, Russia and other countries.

The University of Namibia has started to offer courses for pre-medical studies for our future doctors while the Polytechnic is offering new training programmes for environmental health professionals and medical laboratory technicians. The establishment of a cardiac unit this year will provide more affordable care to our people who will no longer travel abroad for treatment. We also look forward to the establishment of a local medical school to train doctors.

Assistance to orphans and vulnerable children remains a priority, which is being implemented under the National Policy on OVCs. A Plan of Action on OVCs was launched in October last year to supplement ongoing interventions. The Government has started with the process of establishing a National Orphans and Vulnerable Children Database to ensure proper record keeping and planning. This will facilitate efficient provision of services to needy children. At

present, ninety thousand one hundred and twenty six (90126) orphans and vulnerable children are receiving grants through the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare.

The grant amounts to N\$200 for the first child and N\$100 for every additional child per one parent or foster parent. A new initiative has been launched by our Government with the support of UNICEF to support OVCs in Omaheke, Caprivi, Kavango, Ohangwena and Omusati Regions. It focuses on strengthening the capacity of communities to care for OVCs through training, awareness campaigns and income generating projects.

The welfare of the veterans of Namibia's liberation struggle has been a source of concern, as many continue to live in difficult conditions of unemployment and poverty. These brave sons and daughters of Namibia deserve to be assisted. I am happy that the process of addressing their plight has been intensified with the establishment of the Ministry of Veterans' Affairs and the passing of the Veteran's Bill.

Consultations have started with relevant stakeholders to facilitate the registration of eligible veterans before they can start receiving their grants. The budget for the 2008/2009 Financial Year provides for the payment of N\$2 000.00 per veteran per month. The social safety net for the elderly is also being strengthened. The new budget increases social grants to the amount of N\$450 per month. Financial support to give our senior citizens descent burials when they pass on will also continue to be provided.

Honourable Speaker

Honourable Chairperson,

Our nation's future depends on our youth who must be moulded to participate actively in the social and economic development of our country. Our Government recognises the challenges faced by our youth, especially the risks of HIV/Aids infection, unemployment, unplanned pregnancies, drug abuse and other social vices. I wish to assure the Namibian people of our Government's resolve to create opportunities for all our youth to realize their full potential.

The pro-youth policy interventions that are in place will be strengthened. Already, the National Youth Service Scheme is making a difference in the lives of many young Namibians by giving them new skills and competencies. I call upon the private sector to open their doors to thousands of our youth who go through the training programmes of the National Youth Service by offering them employment, apprenticeships and scholarships to study further. We are conscious that the post-independence generation is slowly but surely coming of age. Those who were born after independence will this year exercise their democratic right to vote. This is, therefore, a critical time for our country to reflect deeply on the challenges facing our youth today. A nation with a well-educated youth who aim for excellence is a nation with a brighter future. Therefore, the future of our country can only be secured if we give them the necessary skills to compete in the modern economy.

The backlog in the provision of adequate and affordable housing is a challenge that is being addressed. The shortage is most vivid in rural and peri-urban areas. Legal mechanisms exist to address the shortage of housing in proclaimed areas. This has facilitated investment in the provision of housing by the National Housing Enterprise in our towns and cities. In 2006/2007, more than N\$30 million was invested in the construction of new houses. For the 2007/2008 period, an amount of about N\$76.2 million was budgeted to build 700 new homes.

However, the situation is more critical in rural communities, where it has become difficult to acquire building materials for traditional dwellings and where NHE is unable to invest. The current floods have destroyed traditional homes in many communities. Innovative ways must be found to prevent our rural communities from becoming homeless. A balance must be found between the imperative of environmental conservation and the need to meet the housing needs of rural Namibians. As it now stands, there is a policy vacuum whereby Government is constrained to address the housing needs of citizens who reside in non-proclaimed areas. This gap must be closed through innovative policy initiatives. Housing is one of the basic needs in human existence and it is central to the achievement of our long-term national development goals.

We are slowly but surely reaching our target of providing the majority of our communities with clean drinking water. During the review period, many existing boreholes were rehabilitated while new ones were drilled. The Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry has started to build earth dams to harvest water during the rain season for use during the dry periods. This will hopefully alleviate the problem faced by many rural communities to provide water for their livestock.

The network of water pipelines criss-crossing the country has reached many communities in remote areas. An amount of N\$25 million is available in the current budget to continue with the work of providing more Namibians with clean drinking water. I am concerned by reports that in some areas, the water infrastructures have been vandalized. This should not be tolerated and those engaging in such destructive behaviours should face the full wrath of the law. In this respect, community members should remain on alert to protect their water points.

Honourable Speaker
Honourable Chairperson,

Another important indicator of socio-economic upliftment is the provision of electric power to households, businesses, industries and public institutions such as schools, hospitals and other facilities. Again, it is in the rural and peri-urban areas where the supply of electricity is disproportionately low. It is also in these areas where the effects of the limited availability of this important catalyst are most visible in the form of lower school pass rates, unemployment, higher rates of crime, poor hygiene etc. We will continue to intensify electrification in rural and peri-urban areas to address these problems.

At the same time, more efforts must be made to promote and expand the use of alternative and renewable sources of energy such as solar power. In light of the power shortages in the SADC Region, I encourage Namibians to use facilities such as the Solar Revolving Fund, which is supported by Government, to acquire solar power installations.

Honourable Speaker
Honourable Chairperson,

A vibrant economy is crucial for the achievement of our national development goals. In this regard, we must continue to introduce and implement innovative policies to foster economic growth, job creation and competitiveness. Our efforts aimed at attracting investments and promoting employment creation are being implemented by a number of agencies, such the Development Bank of Namibia (DBN), the Offshore Development Company (ODC) and the Namibia Investment Centre.

In 2007, the DBN financed projects in various sectors of our economy such as energy, mining, telecommunications, health, road infrastructure and manufacturing. This funding has resulted in the creation of more than 2000 new jobs.

In partnership with Bank Windhoek, the Bank has also provided support to the SME sector, under its Special Development Fund extending just under N\$60 million to 74 SMEs and creating 586 jobs. In addition, the Off-Shore Development Company also facilitated the establishment of new business ventures.

These include the launching of a granite polishing factory at Walvis Bay and the establishment of new diamond cutting and polishing factories. The establishment of the Namibia Diamond Trading Company to sell Namibian diamonds to local companies has increased interest for investments under the auspices of our Economic Processing Zone. These activities are contributing to the realization of our objectives towards increased value addition, industrialisation and exports of value-added goods. Investigations are continuing to recover funds that went missing at ODC. The nation will be informed at an appropriate time regarding progress made in this case.

I am happy to report that new Industrial infrastructures were completed during the review period. In May last year, I commissioned the David Shikomba Business Park at Ongwediva. SME Business Parks were also commissioned at Oshikuku and Katwitwi. Similar facilities to promote economic growth and business activities are planned in different parts of the country. At Oshakati, land has been acquired for the construction of the Agro-Food Processing Centre. Feasibility Studies for the development of an Automotive Hub at Walvis Bay, Business Parks at Outjo, Okakarara, Helao Nafidi and Ongwediva have been completed. Similar facilities are being planned for Karasburg, Omaruru, Okahandja and other places where they do not exist.

After consideration, Cabinet has recinded its earlier decision to dissolve the NDC and directed that the company should be restructured and given a new mandate. It will no longer be involved in financing of enterprises as this is provided for in the mandate of the DBN. In this regard, the NDC Act and the DBN Act will be amended in order to give effect to this arrangement.

New jobs generated by our economy have not been sufficient to reduce the level of unemployment significantly. This calls for united action on the part of Government and the private sector to promote sustainable economic growth. In fact, all economic actors must join this endeavour so that, together, we can improve Namibia's future economic trajectory.

The growth in the mining sector has been encouraging, marked notably by the opening of new uranium mines in the country. The mines have not only raised our country's investment profile internationally, but they have also created new employment opportunities for our people.

We look forward to the commissioning of new uranium mines in the near future, when the Valencia deposit and Trekkopje Project come on stream. In general, the value of exported minerals has increased considerably due to high demand in international markets.

Exploration activities for various minerals such as oil, gold, diamonds and uranium are continuing. A viable gold deposit has been discovered at Otjikoto, where a new mine could be commissioned next year. Diamond exploration has increased in the Kavango and Caprivi Regions. An agreement signed last year between our Government and De Beers ensures that 16 percent of all cuttable diamonds mined locally are sold to companies operating in Namibia. There are now 16 diamond cutting and polishing factories in the country. Mineral licences have been granted to two companies to explore the viability of exploiting limestone deposits in Erongo and Otjozondjupa Regions for the production of cement.

Our Government has also allocated N\$15 million to support small scale miners to enable them to improve their incomes.

Despite challenging environmental conditions, the fisheries sector continues to thrive, maintaining a workforce of some 13 400 people. Last year, the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources completed the implementation of the Vessel Monitoring System. As a result, each fishing vessels licenced in Namibia is now fitted with an Automatic Location Communicator, except for those exempted by relevant regulations. Authorities are now able to track and monitor the movements of fishing vessels operating in our exclusive economic zone and adjacent international waters. This has become an important tool in the protection, conservation and sustainable utilization of our marine resources. Complementing these measures is the acquisition of a new Fishing Patrol Aircraft which was delivered and deployed for service in November last year.

Ongoing training programmes at the Namibia Maritime and Fisheries Institute have produced a corps of qualified personnel who are now serving the Namibian fishing industry.

In order to take stock of developments in this sector over the last eighteen years, and to chart a sustainable future course, an International Fisheries Conference will be hosted in the country this year.

The aquaculture sub-sector is showing promise with new projects having been launched in different parts of the country. The Kamutjonga Inland Fisheries Institute which will be inaugurated next month will provide deeper knowledge about this sub-sector through applied research. The Government has commissioned studies to investigate the potential of aquaculture in different regions of the country.

Honourable Speaker
Honourable Chairperson,

Our Government fully supports the strengthening of the tourism sector. We, therefore, welcome the opening of new tourism facilities such as the Sossus Dune Lodge and the International Tourism Access Facilities at the MataMata and Sendelingsdrift Border posts. Our Government will continue to support the good efforts of our State owned enterprise, Namibia Wildlife Resorts (NWR). Through the upgrading and establishment of tourism facilities, a number of jobs have been created for Namibian citizens. I would therefore like to congratulate NWR and look forward to the establishment of more tourist facilities, especially in the Etosha National Park, so that more job opportunities can be created. The Etosha Centenary Celebrations last year exposed our tourism sector to increased international focus.

I am happy to report that according to the latest Tourism Satellite Account research released by the World Travel and Tourism Council for the period 2009 to 2018, Namibia is projected to have the fastest growth in travel and tourism industry in the world. Our tourism sector is also projected to produce the second highest projected growth in terms of contribution to GDP which is projected at 10.5 percent per annum. Direct employment is projected at 7.4 per cent over the same period. These statistics provide good indicator for achieving our national objectives as set out in Vision 2030. I am happy to report that Namibia's elephant management plan has been approved. This paves the way for the sale of ivory within the framework of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

Tourism goes hand-in-hand with the conservation of our natural ecosystems. As such, we welcome the passing of the Environment Management Bill by our Parliament to support our existing conservation measures.

Honourable Speaker
Honourable Chairperson,

Food production is at the centre stage of our drive to combat poverty. Through the Seeds and Fertiliser Subsidy Scheme, our Government has started to provide fertilizers to mahangu and maize farmers in order to improve crop yields.

The Ministry will conduct training and demonstration sessions to create awareness and best practices among the beneficiaries of the scheme. In the same vein, Agribank will soon start to offer training and support to emerging farmers in the areas of livestock and crop production. Another initiative will involve the provision of reduced interest rates on loans to emerging farmers with a view to improving profitability and long-term sustainability of farming operations. More Namibians are accessing and utilizing the services offered by Agribank to improve their farming operations. During the review period, more than 350 loans amounting to nearly N\$60 million were approved by Agribank.

Honourable Speaker
Honourable Chairperson,

The Government has a duty to plan for the expansion and maintenance of our physical and communication infrastructure, which is the backbone and a crucial catalyst for the smooth running of our economy and the movement of people and goods. In this light, Government ministries and state-owned enterprises have implemented various capital projects in different sectors.

The construction of the new office block at the new State House has been completed. It was inaugurated during the 18th Independence Anniversary celebrations this year. The construction of the Presidential Residence has started. During the review period, 373 kilometers of gravel roads were upgraded to bitumen standards, while the construction of a major highway from Rundu to Elundu has started.

This is an important project not only for Namibia, but also for the SADC Region in terms of regional trade and commerce. It is expected to cost about N\$810.5 million. In addition, workers are already on site to rehabilitate the road between Okahandja and Karibib, which road forms a vital link in the Trans Kalahari Corridor. The Eiseb-Otjinene-Epukiro and the Gam-Eiseb Road will be gravelled.

Our Government has also funded the labor-based gravelling of approximately 160 Kilometers of rural roads in Caprivi, Erongo, Kavango, Kunene and Oshikoto Regions. Many people will be employed during the construction phase of these projects. The construction of feeder roads is aimed at improving transport for rural communities and to promote trade.

The expansion and rehabilitation of our rail network is on track. We celebrated the completion of Phase One of the Northern Railway Extension Project which heralded a new era of rail transportation in Northern Namibia. We look forward to the completion of Phase Two which will reach the border town of Oshikango, from where it will eventually be linked to the Angolan Rail network as part of Trans Kunene Railway Project. Cargo transport on the Northern Railway Extension Project has seen remarkable growth with a positive impact on our economy.

The volume of cargo transport from Tsumeb to Ondangwa grew from 38, 911 metric tonnes to 118, 874 metric tonnes between April 2006 and February 2008. During the same period, cargo from Ondangwa to Tsumeb grew from 324 metric tonnes to 1,711 metric tonnes. This phenomenal growth shows that the project has a positive impact on our economy. I have no doubt that the volume of cargo will continue to increase.

We also look forward to the completion of the upgrading of the runway at the Walvis Bay Airport in October this year. The runway is being upgraded to accommodate larger aircrafts, both for passenger and cargo transport.

Other important infrastructures that also have economic significance are our ports. NamPort has compiled a Master Plan for expansion of our ports. The Plan has assumed a regional dimension, in line with our focus on regional economic integration.

This regional focus was strengthened with the creation of Walvis Bay Corridor Group as well as the Trans Caprivi, Trans Kalahari, Trans Kunene and Trans Orange initiatives, linking the Ports of Walvis Bay and Lüderitz with Angola, Botswana, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe via the surfaced road network. This new orientation will reposition Namibia as a key player in regional economic integration and seaborne trade between SADC and the rest of the world.

Over the next five years, our ports will undergo major upgrading to increase efficiency, improve capacity to handle larger cargo vessels and provide additional services to clients. These include lengthening the commercial quay, deepening the ports to 16 meters, providing a dedicated fishing quay, acquiring ship-to shore cranes, establishing an offshore ship repair facility and building a bulk storage facility among others.

Honourable Speaker
Honourable Chairperson,

All sectors of our economy must embrace the information technology revolution. This is vital for the Namibian economy to remain competitive. It will also enable citizens to communicate with each other better and for businesses to deliver goods and services to the consumers in a timely manner.

I am glad that Namibian companies in the information communication technology sector are able to bring Namibian consumers the latest services and products such as a broadband internet access and mobile telephone services. Our Government is in the process of introducing the Communications Bill. When passed, it will establish a new Communications Regulatory Authority for Namibia to regulate electronic communication networks and services. It will also facilitate the re-organisation of the state-owned companies in the information communication technology sector. It is for this reason that I restructured the old Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to the new Ministry of Information and Communication Technology.

Honourable Speaker
Honourable Chairperson,

There is a strong correlation between the ability of the Government to deliver efficient public services and the professionalism and dedication of the civil service. A strong correlation also exists between the Government's ability to deliver vis-à-vis the regulatory mechanisms and frameworks that we have put in place. In this context, the deployment of the civil service and the resources at our disposal must all be geared towards the achievement of our stated objectives. This calls for proper planning and co-ordination of all Government activities.

I have said it in the past and I will say it again, that in the implementation process, the left hand must know what the right hand is doing and vice versa. After all, the provision of public amenities, the promotion of economic growth, the prevention of crime, the building of stronger communities and the attainment of Vision 2030 are all interrelated. We can only move forward with greater confidence if we make sure that all Government activities are well co-ordinated.

We will not relent in our pursuit to strengthen the capacity of the civil service to deliver more efficiently and effectively. Towards this end, the Namibia Institute of Public Administration and Management will be established soon. Another important measure is the completion of the public service-wide Strategic Planning Process. This will streamline and harmonise planning and goal setting in the public service. It will also reintroduce the Performance Management System so that each civil servant can be held accountable for the agreed goals and targets of performance. The majority of Offices, Ministries and Agencies have completed their Strategic Plans, while others are in the process of doing so.

Our overall aim is to promote excellence across all aspects of service delivery, accelerate implementation of public policies, and reduce bureaucratic bottlenecks and red tape. Delays in the issuing of national documents, registration of companies, the backlog in our courts, inefficiencies at our ports of entry and other delays in all areas of service delivery should become a thing of the past. The public service infrastructure must be fine-tuned so that it can operate professionally.

I am glad to report that, despite challenges, public service delivery has improved in many areas. The past headache caused by delays in the issuing of national identity documents has largely been resolved. The Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration has equipped 10 vehicles to serve as mobile offices for the registration of national documents. This will provide welcome relief to many citizens who will no longer have to travel long distances to apply for or to collect their national documents. The waiting period for passports and various types of visas and permits will also be reduced drastically through an automation system. Plans are underway to install an integrated system linking the issuing of permits with the Border Control Management System.

Honourable Speaker
Honourable Chairperson,

The administration of justice is a central feature of our constitutional democracy and the rule of law. Thus, everything must be done to ensure that our courts dispense justice speedily in line with the provisions of the Namibian constitution. It is for this reason that measures have been implemented to address the backlog of cases on our court rolls. I agree with the sentiment that justice delayed is justice denied. For this reason, we as a Government should not be seen to be denying justice to anyone.

The establishment of two Regional Offices of the Ombudsman at Oshakati and Keetmanshoop is a welcome development. This must be accompanied by an aggressive education campaign to sensitive communities about the work and mandate of the Ombudsman. It will encourage members of these two communities and other Namibians to enforce their rights whenever, and wherever they are violated.

Honourable Speaker
Honourable Chairperson

We can only achieve excellence in service delivery and good governance if our systems for enforcing accountability and transparency are strong. Towards this end, the work of our compliance enforcement agencies must be supported. Here I have in mind, the work of the Anti-Corruption Commission, the Ombudsman and the Office of the Auditor General. The auditing function is crucial to ensure that funds allocated to various Public bodies are utilized responsibly and for the stated purpose. I am informed that the Office has carried out various performance audits dealing with procurement, trophy hunting, medical stores, police vehicles, disaster management, over-crowding in prisons and holding cells as well as capital projects.

We look forward to the tabling of these audits to hear and see what they reveal. I am pleased to report that, through hardwork, the Auditor General has been able to clear the backlog on the audit reports of Government institutions. I urge all relevant institutions to ensure that Namibia develops a complete and reliable system of accounting for all public assets, starting from fixed to mobile assets of different kinds.

These assets belong to the Namibian people and Government should be able to account for each and every item.

Honorable Speaker
Honourable Chairperson,

The drought and floods which occurred during the review period have devastated many communities. Many farmers lost substantial numbers of livestock to both the drought and the heavy rains that followed. As if that was not enough, the flood water inundated large parts of northern and north eastern Namibia. Given the magnitude of the challenge, I declared the flood situation in Namibia a “national disaster”. The flood has claimed several human lives and

caused destruction to businesses, homes, public facilities, roads and bridges as well as crop fields. It has also caused the outbreak of water borne diseases such as cholera and malaria.

Our Government has mobilized resources to deal with the impact of the flood and provide relief to those affected. Several families have been evacuated from their flooded homes and placed in temporary shelter. A Disaster Co-coordinating Committee has been established to oversee relief efforts. An indepth assessment will be made to determine the extent of the damage caused to our national infrastructures such as roads and bridges in order to determine the resources required to repair the damage. I wish to express my appreciation to our citizens, businesses, non-governmental organisations and our development co-operation partners who have supported our relief efforts. Your assistance is highly appreciated.

I also thank our neighbouring countries who have come to our rescue during this national disaster. This solidarity has, once again, underlined the importance of our engagement with other countries at the regional, continental and international levels.

The period under review was a busy one on the diplomatic front. As part of our commitment to strengthen bilateral cooperation between Namibia and other states, I visited a number of countries. Namibia was also honoured to host nine Heads of State and Government and other dignitaries who visited our country. During these visits, a number of important agreements in various areas of cooperation were signed.

With a view to expanding and strengthening our representation abroad, Namibia opened new diplomatic missions in the Arab Republic of Egypt and the United Republic of Tanzania. I also commissioned new Ambassadors and High Commissioners to represent Namibia abroad, while I received numerous Ambassadors and High Commissioners accredited to Namibia during the past year.

The hosting of the Namibia International Investors Conference in Windhoek, which I co-chaired with H.E. President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa has opened up new opportunities for foreign direct investments in our country.

At multilateral level, Namibia has remained actively engaged in efforts towards promoting international peace, security and sustainable social and economic development within the framework of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN). In this context, we actively participated in a number of Heads of State and Government Summits such as, the Southern African Development Community Summit, the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting and the EU-Africa Summit. We remain an active member of the AU Committee of Ten on the Reform of the United Nations. Namibia was also elected to the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) during the last Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

I am pleased to mention that Namibia successfully concluded our mission to Liberia as part of the United Nations Peace Keeping Mission and stands ready to make similar contributions in future under SADC, the AU and UN.

Honourable Speaker
Honourable Chairperson,

I address this august house at a time when the economic situation here in Namibia and the rest of the world is not very favourable. This has caused difficulties for many families as a result of the increase in the price of basic commodities and services such as food and transport. Our Government is working hard to weather these difficult times. We are confident that through prudent macro-economic policies, we will be able to bring more prosperity to our people. In order to do this, however, we must act pragmatically and with reasoned judgment at all times. That is what good leadership is all about.

The current economic situation should not be a cause for alarm. Our economic fundamentals remain strong and this gives us strong hope for the future. It also ensures us that the state of our nation remains strong. We must use the available opportunities and our comparative advantages to build and re-inforce a stronger foundation for competitiveness and prosperity. Namibians should join hands in the nation's quest to make our country better. This is our home and our mother land. It is the place that we call home, and the place where the future generations will call home. Let us make it better for the present and the future generations.

Honourable Speaker
Honourable Chairperson

Despite the remaining challenges, we can look at the period under review with a sense of accomplishment because the implementation of our policies is progressing. There are many areas where improvement is definitely needed.

We need to redouble our efforts to improve the state of education; we need to accelerate the delivery of housing, electricity and health care. At the same time, we need to expand access to services for our communities to enjoy modern amenities and services. We need to do more to promote economic activities, to economically empower the previously disadvantaged communities and create employment opportunities.

These are real challenges that we now face and will continue to face in the foreseeable future. However, these challenges are not insurmountable. The policy mix of pragmatism, and common sense will see us through these problems. Our priority areas have been articulated and are clearly set out in our national development plans (NDPs), 2004 SWAPO PARTY Election Manifesto and Vision 2030. We will continue to pursue these priorities for the benefit of all our people and the development of our country. The passing Financial Year is a vital milestone in our march towards the achievement of Vision 2030.

It was a period during which we further consolidated our gains and moved a step closer towards our stated goals. This Financial Year will be marked by hard work and relentless pursuit of our goals. The new budget has provided a clear framework and vision for increased delivery of goods and services to more Namibians. I am convinced that the pro-poor orientation of our budget is the right approach in both the short and long term. It will ultimately mean that no community is left behind in the socio-economic development process.

Our belief that all Namibian children deserve an equal chance must remain unshaken. It is only in this manner that we can transform our country both socially and economically to make it a better place for all to live in. We cannot allow the majority of our people to swim in the sea of poverty, while a small minority is secure on islands of prosperity. That is not what the struggle for national liberation was all about. It is not what the hard won independence should perpetuate.

I wish to assure the Namibian people that our SWAPO PARTY Government is committed to improve and expand access to health care, education, potable water, electricity, housing and other public services and amenities. We are also committed to promote transparency and combat crime. This will always be accompanied by concrete action and implementation plan. In the same manner, we remain true to our resolve to ensure that our roads, railways, telephone networks and other public infrastructure remain in a state of good repair to serve as catalysts for economic growth and smooth movement of people and goods. Our Government will continue to introduce measures aimed at providing our youth with relevant skills and knowledge to make them competitive vis-à-vis their counterparts in the region and beyond.

Their ingenuity and competencies represent a powerful force for the achievement of Vision 2030. Namibia has been blessed with peace and stability. This has enabled us to focus on development programmes and the delivery of public services. I, therefore, call upon all Namibians to continue to maintain peace and harmony with their neighbours and indeed all their fellow Namibians. We must all preach and practice mutual respect, tolerance and co-operation in the process of nation-building. We must continue to promote our policy of National Reconciliation.

Honourable Speaker
Honourable Chairperson

We start the new Financial Year with renewed commitment to the achievement of our national priorities. The Honourable Members of this august House have been scrutinizing and debating the 2008/2009 Appropriation Bill for the past few weeks. I am pleased that overall, the Bill has received the support of the majority of the Honourable Members.

I am also pleased that, where warranted, genuine criticisms have been raised with the view to improve. The Appropriation Bill is a planning tool for the execution of Government plans over a specific period.

While I have highlighted some of the major intended plans of Government in the new Financial Year and beyond, the Appropriation Bill provides the full details of Government expenditure in the next 12 months.

As we look back at the period under review, we are encouraged by the successes that have been recorded. At the same time, we are reminded of the improvements that we must make in order to serve more people, reach more communities and improve the living conditions of those Namibians who live in difficult conditions. The lessons of the past have spurred us to plan better and work smarter. We are confident that we will do better, achieve more and improve the performance of the public service in the new Financial Year and in the future.

Namibia must always be a winning nation. Namibia must continue to walk tall among the community of free nations. Namibia must be a country of equal opportunities to every citizen. Namibia must be a country of hope and pride for the current and future generations. Namibia must be a country where the vices of tribalism, regionalism, nepotism, corruption, racism, sexism and crime have no place. Our SWAPO PARTY Government is fully committed to achieving these objectives.

Long Live the Republic of Namibia!

I thank you.