



Republic of Namibia

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

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MINISTER OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

AT THE

WORLD INDIGENOUS BUSINESS FORUM (WIBF)

OCTOBER 16, 2013 AT 16:45

WINDHOEK

Director of Ceremonies

Hon. Carlos Batzin, Minister of Culture from Guatemala

The President and CEO of the World Indigenous Business Forum

The Coordinators of the World Indigenous Business Forum and Indigenous Business Forum (WIBF)

Representatives of other Government Offices and Ministries present

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Esteemed members of the Business Community

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great pleasure for me, on behalf of the Government of Namibia, to officiate at this World Indigenous Business Forum 2013, which I am informed, is being hosted on the African Continent for the first time. I wish to extend a warm Namibian welcome to all the delegates in attendance especially those who have come from different parts of the world, notably Guatemala, the United States of America, Canada, Australia and Norway. I extend a special warm Namibian welcome to Hon. Carlos Batzin, Minister of Culture from Guatemala and his delegation.

Esteemed participants, Ladies and Gentlemen

When Namibia became a sovereign and independent Republic on March 21, 1990, it adopted a Constitution that among others guaranteed “the right of the individual to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, regardless of race, color, ethnic origin, sex, religion, creed or social or economic status”. Indeed, Namibia prides herself in being one of the most vibrant democracies not only on the African continent but by global standards.

The principles of peaceful co-existence of all the inhabitants of this land, liberty, justice, unity in diversity and a loyalty to a single State, the Republic of Namibia, were reinforced through the adoption of a Policy of National Reconciliation at the time of independence and other subsequent policies and programmes that foster an environment where all Namibians can live and operate freely.

The current and future policies and interventions by the Government of Namibia and the citizens, who are the ones who voted the Government to power, are and will always be governed and premised on the stipulations of the Constitution, the Supreme Law of our land. In this connection Namibia has adopted Vision 2030 as a long-term roadmap to guide the country towards becoming “a prosperous and industrialized” country “developed by her human resources, enjoying peace, harmony and political stability”. This national Vision recognizes that prosperity, peace and political stability can best be realized and brought about by ensuring adequate infrastructure and capacity in terms of human skills development, industrial and economic growth and development.

Ladies and gentlemen

The Government of Namibia has, since independence, adopted and pursued policies and programmes aimed at fostering an environment and conditions where its citizens can have access to resources and undertake economic or business activities that will result in them improving their individual and collective social welfare and national economic growth and development.

Given the skewed ownership and distribution of means of income, production and wealth in the country, a special attention has been given to the sections of the Namibian society that were historically marginalized and still continued to face a number of constraints in their endeavors to improve their lot and contribute to national development.

Some of the notable policy interventions in support of the indigenous people are in the areas of access to natural resources and to improve the capacity of communities to carry out sustainable self-help income- and employment-generating business activities. In this regard, a number of policy initiatives have been implemented to grant and expand access to and ownership of natural resources in resource-based sectors such as the mining, fisheries and tourism. The Government's community-based conservancy and tourism policy and programme, is one such successful initiative that has won the country international accolades. Other notable measures are in the areas of affirmative action and employment equity. We have also adopted policies to protect and promote the exploitation of genetic resources indigenous plant varieties, traditional knowledge, traditional cultural expressions and folklore, which are the naturally resources available to or in the hands of indigenous communities to the benefits of those communities.

As you will agree with me, Governments in developing countries such as Namibia need adequate policy space to implement measures to safeguard the rights and benefits of their indigenous people and inhabitants, but such requisite policy space is being threatened or put under pressure in the face of current multilateral trading arrangement or negotiations. Our collective action is needed to safeguard that policy space and flexibility for us to call into action measures that will ensure that indigenous or as they say home-grown resources and knowledge are exploited in ways that ensures that the benefits accruing therefrom is shared with the indigenous population and entire local population.

Ladies and gentlemen

In the trade and industry sector, we have also adopted and implemented several business support programmes to increase opportunities for poverty reduction, employment and wealth creation by supporting local entrepreneurial efforts

especially in rural areas and at micro, small and medium scale industry levels. Given the paradox of Namibia being a rich country, as measured in terms GDP per capita, on the one hand, and the prevailing high inequality, poverty and unemployment, on the other, we have focused our effort on promoting manufacturing and value addition to our natural resources.

In this regard, the Ministry of Trade and Industry is spearheading the *Growth at Home* strategy. The strategy, which is premised on the developmental focus of the country's Vision 2030 and the current National Development Plan (NDP 4), emphasizes collaborative efforts and investments by both the Government and business sector in developing adequate industrial production and supply-side capacity that will help the country to process and turn its natural resources into finished or semi-finished goods for consumption at home and for exports. Value chains and linkages between the various sectors of our economy and at regional levels offer opportunities for greater economic activities and employment than the resource extractive operations that have predominantly been taking place in Africa and obviously remain the main focus of most of the foreign direct investment flows into the continent over the years.

In our search for solutions to poverty and unemployment, we recognize the small and medium scale enterprises and indigenous businesses as useful vehicles for creating employment opportunities and self-help economic activities that will in turn reduce incidences of poverty and enhance sustained economic growth, a fair distribution of income and wealth and social harmony. In this regard, the Government has since 1997 developed and been implementing a policy and series of programmes aimed at addressing the challenges that often hamper the effective establishment, operation and growth of the SME sector and the sector's potential to contribute to employment, exports and the country's gross domestic product (GDP).

The main challenges identified, and thus the focus of our policy interventions, are access to finance, marketing, production technology and equipment, business infrastructure and entrepreneurial skills. In response we have designed a number of targeted interventions in the following areas:

- Improving **access to Finance**, and our interventions here have resulted in the establishment of an SME Bank;
- The Government also develops and provides affordable basic business infrastructure for leasing by SMEs across the country through its **Business Sites and Premises** Development Programme;
- The provision of **Production Equipment and Technology**, an Equipment Aid Scheme;
- Assistance with **product development and marketing** as well as **linkage of small scale producers to retail outlets**; and
- Entrepreneurial **skills development and business mentorship**.

Ladies and gentlemen

The policy initiatives and programmes, that I have just referred to in support of indigenous businesses and SMEs in general, have delivered and continue to deliver tangible results. Thousands of SMEs and community based business initiatives have been established and have decent premises to set up and do business from, while others were able to secure start-up capital from commercial banks through a loan guarantee facility that was set up by the Government and which has now been replaced by the SME Bank. Many more small business operators are able to produce more efficiently and able to supply large businesses with the help that they have received through our equipment aid scheme and a range of other business support services in the areas of project conceptualization and development, business management skills, product development and marketing.

Ladies and gentlemen

As a member of the global community, Namibia will continue to think globally, while at the same ensuring that our actions nationally and globally bring about Growth at Home, measured in terms of tangible benefits to our people. One of the realities from globalization is that, while we are endowed with genetic or indigenous resources and know-how, we cannot effectively compete in this age of globalization if we continue to rely on export of genetic or raw materials. This is the basis for our Growth at Home strategy and emphasis on manufacturing, local value addition and the development of value chains, and for a fair share from distribution of benefits from such processes to accrue to the inhabitants through meaningful employment, participation and ownership.

I have no doubt the experiences from other countries that are participating in this Forum will enrich the discussions and the efforts that Namibia is making to promote the rights of and benefits to her citizens amidst challenging global economic and trading arrangements.

For our brothers and sisters from other countries, I trust that you will make time, away from the Conference, to experience the beauty of Namibia, which is found in the warmth of her people and the breath-taking natural fauna and flora.

It is now my pleasure to declare this Forum officially open, and I thank you all for your attention.