

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



**REMARKS BY MRS. PENEHUPIFO POHAMBA, FIRST LADY OF
THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA, ON THE OCCASION OF THE 54TH
SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

***REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
BEIJING DECLARATION AND PLATFORM OF ACTION (BPFA)
AND THE OUTCOME OF THE 23RD SPECIAL SESSION OF THE
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY***

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Chairperson

I wish to congratulate you and the members of the Bureau for your able leadership in steering the work of this Commission. Above all, your continued commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of women deserves special commendation. My delegation looks forward to fruitful outcomes from this session and wish to assure you of our full cooperation and support.

My delegation associates itself with the statement made by the distinguished Ambassador of Yemen on behalf of G77 and China and the statement of the African Group delivered by the Equatorial Guinea.

My delegation would also like to thank the Secretary-General for the reports submitted under agenda item 3: Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

Chairperson

It is indeed an honor to share with you briefly the progress made by my country, Namibia on the advancement of women since 1995, the year the Beijing Declaration and Platform was adopted. The Government of Namibia has taken its responsibilities seriously to put in place legislations, policies and programmes and to effectively implement them in partnership with NGOs and the civil society.

Progress and achievements made by Namibia in 15 years since the Beijing declaration includes:

- the formulation of gender sensitive laws and policies;
- the implementation of gender mainstreaming programmes, and
- the advocating for women empowerment including in politics and decision making.

Namibia is a signatory to international, continental and regional instruments such as Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; and the UN Convention against Transnational Crime and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (the Palermo Protocol).

It is also a signatory to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development and SADC Addendum on the Prevention and Eradication of Violence against Women and Children to mention but a few.

The Government of the Republic of Namibia expended significant resources in setting up a national legal framework for the advancement of women. The Namibian Constitution guarantees equality of women, and recognizes the need to advance the position of women in the Namibian society. Article 10 of the Namibian Constitution states that "*all persons are equal before the law and that no one should be discriminated against on the grounds of sex, race, colour, ethnic group, religion, creed or social and economic status*".

In addition to the Constitution, national gender related laws and policies were enacted, such as, the Married Persons Equality Act No. 1 of 1996; the Affirmative Action (Employment) Act (No. 29 of 1998); the Maintenance Act No. 9 of 2003; Communal Land Reform Act No. 5 of 2002; Labour Act No 11 of 2007; Combating of Rape Act No. 8 of 2000; and Combating of the Domestic Violence Act No. 4 of 2003.

Two years after Beijing (1997) the Namibian Parliament adopted the National Gender Policy and its Plan of Action as a guiding document to enable line Ministries to mainstream gender into their programmes and policies. The policy has identified ten critical areas of concern.

These are: (i) Gender, Poverty and Rural Development; (ii) Gender Balance in Education and Training; (iii) Gender and Reproductive Health; (iv) Violence against women and children; (v) Gender and Economic Empowerment; (vi) Gender Balance in Power and Decision Making; (vii) Information, Education and Communication; (viii) Gender and Management of the Environment; (ix)The Girl-child and (x) Gender and Legal Affairs.

Progress and achievements have been noted in all of the areas of concern that I have mentioned. I wish to highlight a few of these achievements.

With regard to *Gender, Poverty and Rural Development*, the Government through its Poverty Reduction Strategy has managed to reduce poverty among poor households from 38% to 28%, as well as among the severely poor households from 9% to 4%. Government put in place policies and legislation such as the National Land Policy, Commercial Reform Act and Communal Land Reform Act, to ensure that women have the same status as men to own or inherit land.

Progress has also been in the area of *Gender Balance in Education and Training*. Education is compulsory and access to public schools is free at primary school level. Our statistics have shown that more girls are now attending primary school than boys. The trend continues at the tertiary institutions. In 2006 the national literacy rate reached 84%, an indication that most people in Namibia are able to read and write.

In *Gender and Reproductive Health*, Namibia is in the last stage of implementing the Third Medium Term Plan on HIV and AIDS (2004-2009). A National Policy on HIV and AIDS was also adopted to address the special needs of vulnerable groups such as girls and women and people with disabilities. Currently about One hundred and eleven thousand seven hundred and forty (111, 740) orphans and other vulnerable children (OVC's) are receiving financial assistance from Government to lessen the burden of care givers by supplementing their income in order to ensure that OVC's have access to basic needs.

By 2006, resources were put aside to roll out the Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission, PMTCT programme to all the 13 regions of the country. ARV treatment is now offered free of charge at all government hospitals and the majority of patients accessing this treatment are females. About 16.5% of HIV positive pregnant women were receiving ARV's through the well established PMTCT programme. The Government has also developed a national strategy to improve maternal health.

With regard to *Violence against women and children*, the number of Women and Child Protection Units (WCPUs) has been increased from three units to fifteen units in all thirteen regions. These units have adopted a multi-sectoral approach to assist GBV victims. Service providers have been trained on how to handle GBV cases and Media Practitioners have also been sensitised on how to report on GBV. A National Zero Tolerance Campaign for GBV was launched in July 2009 as part of our Government's effort to raise awareness to this social ill.

A knowledge, attitude and practice study on cultural practices that perpetuate or protect women and children from GBV was conducted in 2007. A National Rapid Assessment study on human trafficking was also conducted in April 2009. The National Advisory Committee on GBV consisting of all stakeholders has been established to advise the Ministry on issues pertaining to GBV in the country. The Ministry is in the process of developing a national GBV Plan of Action and its monitoring and evaluation policy.

On *Gender and Economic Empowerment*, the percentage of women who own small and medium enterprises stand at 38% and women also account for 52.6% of those active in the informal sector. Government introduced through the Development Bank of Namibia a micro-finance scheme to empower grass roots women who could not access loans due to lack of collateral. Government furthermore instituted a Credit Guarantee Scheme to enable women and men to get access to loans from commercial banks.

In *Gender Balance in Power and Decision Making*, we noted that at independence in 1990, the proportion of women in Parliament was 8%. This has risen steadily over the years. Currently (2009) Namibia stands at 31% of women in Parliament (National Assembly and National Council). As per SADC regional ranking of women in parliament, Namibia is ranked 4th while globally Namibia is ranked 31st. Progress can also be seen in positions held by women. For example the post of the Deputy Prime Minister is held by a woman and key Ministries such as Finance, Justice, and Environment and Tourism are headed by female ministers. At political party level, the Secretary General of the ruling party, the SWAPO Party, is a woman.

Women representation in Local Authority stands at 45% and this is largely attributed to the affirmative action clause within the Local Authority Act No 23 of 1992, which makes provision for a zebra list. Following the implementation of Affirmative Action (Employment Equity) Act no 29 of 1998, women senior managers in the public and private sectors stands at 33%. The Ministry of Gender Equality is lobbying for the amendment of the Electoral Act to adopt a quota system for women on the list of the political parties presented for election.

In *Gender and Management of the Environment*; the Namibian Government has made great strides by amending the Nature Conservation Ordinance 4 of 1975, thus allowing for a progressive policy of Community-Based Natural Resource Management. It is hoped that these programmes, combined with adequate female representation in their implementation, would contribute towards greater recognition of the role of women in the protection, management, and use of the environment.

A lot has been done to empower and protect the rights of *the girl child*. The Government of the Republic of Namibia has put policies in place and has mandated relevant stakeholders to address the issue of the girl-child. Some of these policies include the Education Sector HIV and AIDS Policy, the National Policy on Orphans and Vulnerable Children and the Education for All Policy. Furthermore, the Government has entered into a joint initiative with relevant stakeholders to assist economically disadvantaged girls to obtain exemption from paying school-related expenses. The Government has also adopted a policy allowing teenage mothers to return to school.

Despite these achievements it is worth mentioning that Namibia is part of the global village and is experiencing challenges in implementing its policies and programmes. Factors such as Gender Based Violence, HIV and AIDS, negative cultural practices and poverty are still challenges that hamper the achievement of gender equality in Namibia.

Other challenges that Namibia is facing are new and emerging issues at regional and global level, which have implications for the promotion of gender equality in Namibia. Such issues include the worsening situation regarding HIV and AIDS, globalisation and climate change, all of which have a disproportional impact on women and girls.

In 2009 Government, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, embarked upon the process of revising the National Gender Policy. The revised Gender Policy seeks to create an enabling environment for different sectors to mainstream gender.

It focuses on 12 areas of concern, which include (i) Poverty and Rural Development; (ii) Education and Training; (iii) Reproductive health and HIV/AIDS; (iv) Gender Based Violence; (v) Trade and Economic Empowerment; (vi) Gender Governance and Decision Making; (vii) Research, Media, Information and Communication; (viii) Management of the Environment; (ix) Issues of the Girl-child; (x) Gender, Peace Building, Natural Disaster and Conflict Resolution; (xi) Gender Legal Affairs; and (xii) Human Rights.

Chairperson,

In conclusion, I wish to point out that the Government of the Republic of Namibia is committed to the achievement of the gender equality goal, and to a Namibia where all women are empowered and are taking their rightful place in all sectors of the society. We will, as a Government, continue to monitor and evaluate the progress made towards achieving the set goals in attaining gender balance at all levels of decision-making in Namibia.

The Government will continue to pursue various avenues in addressing gender inequality, negative cultural practices, GBV and other forms of discriminatory practices.

At this juncture I would like to express, on behalf of the Namibian Government, our gratitude and appreciation to our development partners, UN Agencies and a special word of thanks to the Government of the Kingdom of Spain. These partners have availed resources through the MDGs fund to assist the Namibian Government to implement gender programmes.

I thank you for your kind attention.