

Don't play ball with graft, says Acting Ombudsman

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THE ball is now in every Namibian's court when it comes to corruption - either tolerate it and accept the dire consequences it will have for the country, or join the fight against it and help save Namibia from its corrosive effects.

That was the thrust of a message from Namibia's Acting Ombudsman, Acting Judge Simpson Mtambanengwe, yesterday when he launched a collection of information material to be used in the National Integrity Promotion Programme (NIPP).

The material - including posters, pamphlets, a comic booklet and broadcast material for radio and television - should start to appear at the country's border posts, in Government and other public offices, in the media and over the airwaves soon, as the NIPP, which the Office of the Ombudsman launched in February, gains momentum.

Among the material is a striking poster which is intended to welcome visitors to Namibia.

It makes the welcome with the simple, clear message: "You are entering a NO tolerance for corruption zone!" before it goes on to invite visitors to report any act of corruption to the Office of the Ombudsman.

The Constitution includes the duty to investigate complaints of corruption among the functions that it assigns to the Ombudsman.

However, while the Office of the Ombudsman had taken a lead in promoting core values such as ethics and integrity in Namibia, it could not be left to that office alone, Diana Swain, Country Director of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), remarked at yesterday's launch.

She explained: "For Namibia to prolong its admirable reputation as one of Africa's most corruption-free nations, society as a whole must be concerned with this issue and willing to play a role in valuing and maintaining sturdy, effective integrity systems".

Apart from choosing leaders, democracy also gave each citizen certain ongoing responsibilities if governance structures were to work, and were to work to the advantage of all citizens, and not just the privileged few, she said.

"(E)ach of us has the responsibility to help governments act in a way that recognises that corruption has to be fought, at all levels, both inside and outside of the public sector," Swain said.

"Corruption must be fought in the interest of those who can least defend themselves against the costs of corruption: the poor, the weak, the vulnerable and the children, who, ultimately, will have to bear the burden of mismanagement, waste and fraud".

Acting Judge Mtambanengwe said: "Corruption is a serious drain on any society's resources, since it depletes and misdirects public funds and it undermines legitimate business and government practices.

"The ball is in every Namibian's court to become active partners in the fight against corruption.

When we knowingly choose to ignore and become victims of corruption, we not only condone corruption, but support the methodical raping of our resources by a few 'greedy' at the expense of ordinary Namibians.

We all have a role in realising the dream of a corruption-free Namibia".

He said the NIPP was a proactive initiative within the Office of the Ombudsman which, through raising public awareness, aimed to empower the general public to combat corruption.

A commitment to making Namibia a corruption-free country was in the national interest, and should unite the country's people in building an exemplary national integrity system that should be the envy of the country's counterparts in the region and on the continent, Acting Judge Mtambanengwe said.

Judging from the media's daily coverage of corruption-related instances, there could be no doubt that Namibia faced a tough battle in making the country corruption-free, he said.

The time to make combined efforts to address the problem, "is now, and not tomorrow", he stated.