

***Remarks by Hon Kandy Nehova
on the occasion of joint Launch of the
Mobile Training Unit and the MRLGH
Website
30 November 2001***

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~~Dear Honourable Minister of Regional and Local Government and Housing, Nickey Iyambo,~~

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His Excellency Ambassador Kevin J. McGuire, US Ambassador to Namibia,

Honourable Members of Cabinet present here,

Honourable Members of Parliament,

Honourable Regional Governors,

Honourable Regional and Local Councillors,

Your Excellencies Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

USAID Director, Diane Swain,

Respected Leaders of the NGO community,

~~Respected Delegates,~~

Members of the Press,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to launch this very exciting project- The Mobile Training Unit (**MTU**). I am very excited by the great possibilities this unit holds for us in our efforts to promote participatory democracy.

On May 31, 2001, The Namibian Parliament launched its Parliament Information Management System (**IMS**). This launch represented the first step in our efforts to foster links with communities in our regions by means of Information Communication Technology.

Today you join me to witness the launch of the second phase of our project, the Mobile Training Unit. This unit will primarily be used to train communities in all the 13 regions of Namibia in the use of the information management system. It is our belief that proper utilization of the Parliament Information Management System (IMS) will only come about if the users are trained. Hence the launch of the Parliament Mobile Training Unit (MTU).

The purpose of the IMS is to link Parliament, particularly the NC Members with the Regional Councils and constituencies in the 13 regions. The IMS is just another tool to facilitate speedy dissemination of legislative information and documents to regions. The IMS makes it possible for Namibian citizens to access the sitting programs of the two Chambers (Houses), Bills before Parliament, from the comfort of their homes, hotels, Internet cafés, offices, etc... Through the IMS, citizens can make written submissions and comments on the bills debated before the Houses or Committees. Equally, the electorate is better positioned to communicate with their parliamentary representatives directly through e-mail.

All this was made possible through the assistance of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through their democracy development entity, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) in Namibia, our partners in the consolidation of our democracy. The support of the US government to our Parliament can not be measured in dollars, but in action. The Mobile Training Unit being launched today is just one examples of this fruitful partnership.

USAID and NDI have provided both financial and technical support to this very important project. NDI has concretely assisted in the design and

implementation of programs, new concepts and new ideas. Tireless efforts have been made to develop concepts, mold them into models and implement them as tools for democratic governance. Indeed, the USAID, NDI and Parliament partnership has placed the Parliament of Namibia on the international map. In July this year, our information communication technology infrastructure, the IMS and the web site were ranked number one at the IDEA E-Governance Conference in Stockholm, Sweden. NDI has developed technology solutions required and necessary for a Parliamentary institution.

We are grateful to NDI for incorporating comprehensive training programs for each solution developed. NDI has developed training programs for our elected representatives in Parliament, this model has been so successful and we are now taking the program to the regions and ultimately to the local authorities. Today, we have a bulk of our members using computers and e-mail, but a lot remains to be done, particularly in the regions. Through the assistance of USAID and NDI, today we are ready to take not only computers and Parliament to the people, but also training. This is a tool that will enable and facilitate a real partnership between elected representatives and civil society.

Through a constituency outreach program which will be fully implemented from January 2002, Parliament through the support of USAID and NDI will be pioneering another innovative program, an initiative which for the first time in the history of our institution will take Parliament to every part of this country. Indeed, in USAID and NDI, the Namibian Parliament has a trusted and worthy partner, a partner who one can rely on, as is evident today.

The Parliament Mobile Training Unit (**MTU**) is a practical attempt to bring Parliament electronically and physically closer to the electorate. As elected representatives, we need to ensure the active participation of our people in the processes of development. Until we have achieved that objective, democracy remains under threat. Therefore we need to remain innovative and inquisitive of new ways of fostering the culture of participatory democracy, and this is but one such innovative mechanism.

To achieve these objectives, our efforts as politicians, need to be coupled and complemented by the skills of technical staff and support agencies such as NDI. Otherwise our policies remain good intentions not realized. Therefore we wish to see this project properly rooted and institutionalized at national, regional and local levels. We had the previous US Ambassador to Namibia and a previous USAID Director and we were informed that the partnership with NDI would become to an end in 2002. Today, we have a new USAID Director and a new Ambassador, together we are witnessing the fruits of your support, I am confident that the new administration will not allow such a successful partnership to be terminated when it is just about to reach its fullest potential.

What we are witnessing today has taken months and years to develop, we now have the basic foundation and we are moving into the implementation phase, this is not the time to wind up programs, please do what you can to make sure that support for the consolidation of this foundation continues. The survival of democracy lies in the strength of its institutions.

Clearly Namibia is hailed for its democratic policies (our liberal Constitution, the decentralization policy, and now this constituency outreach initiative). But unless we ensure the consolidation of these

programs, ensure that the people at grass-root levels participate actively in these processes, take ownership of these programs, our democracy becomes artificial. In the long run we risk the destruction of our democratic institutions and consequently, the loss of our hard-won democracy. The support of the Ministry of Regional and Local Government and Housing is therefore greatly appreciated. The collaboration between the Ministry and Parliament is a collaboration that other institutions should follow, because united, we stand stronger as institutions and as a country.

Let me not forget our technical staff at Parliament. I would like to praise the Parliament Information Management System (**IMS**) Committee for the splendid job they have done in co-coordinating together with NDI and IT Department and officials from the Ministry of Regional and Local Government and Housing, the joint launch of the Parliament Mobile Training Unit and the Ministry's Website. I wish to encourage you to keep on rendering good performance and also to ensure that the **IMS** does not lose its relevance by constantly updating information on the site. I would also like to thank the corporate sector for their support, Microsoft, COMPAQ and the ITD and Radiator Services, the bus was driven from South Africa, and upon arrival, Radiator Services replaced all the tires on the bus, this is indeed a commendable contribution. I would also like to thank the contribution of FINSERVE Aluminum Company for the support rendered at the Windhoek show, where Parliament won third position.

I wish to highlight that these noble efforts (of introducing our citizens to the benefits of technological use) will not come to fruition if there is no follow-up from the representative structures of the people. I am referring to the Parliament, Regional Councils, Village Councils, Municipal Councils, etc.

By way of illustration, the UK Parliament has established the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST), an office for MPs to turn to when considering or initiating legislation that deals with ICT and science affairs, on the other hand, the US Congress also has small units that provide science and technology support to Parliamentarians. The Indian Parliament on its part has created the Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training that offers training to officials and MPs on S&T on a regular basis. Similarly, we could establish support structures to ensure proper utilization of these facilities.

Masters of ceremonies, I was asked to make a few remarks for the launch of the Mobile Training Unit and I think I have definitely done more than just a few remarks. I now wish to proceed with the exciting ceremonial task: to officially launch the MTU and with these words, 'let the wheels of democracy roll on...', I officially launch the MTU!

I thank you