



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

**HONOURABLE KATRINA HANSE-HIMARWA, MP
MINISTER OF EDUCATION, ARTS AND CULTURE
AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF
THE 20TH ANNUAL CULTURE FESTIVAL**

KEETMANSHOOP, 09 DECEMBER 2015

Director of Ceremonies
Honourable Minsters and Deputy Ministers present today
Honourable Lucia Basson, Governor of //Kharas Region
Honourable Gaudentia Willemse, Mayor of Keetmanshoop
Honourable Regional and Local Authority Councillors
Members of the Diplomatic Corps
Distinguished Traditional Authority Leaders
Esteemed Spiritual Leaders
Distinguished Cultural Groups from All Corners of Namibia
Distinguished Invited Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

I am greatly honoured to stand before the jubilant and distinguished participants and cultural practitioners who are gathered at the 20th Annual National Cultural Festival being held in the capital of the South, Keetmanshoop.

The celebration of Namibia's diverse cultures and heritage during this year's Festival confirms and acknowledges our constitutional rights as stipulated in Article 19 of the Namibian Constitution. We envisage ourselves as a united and flourishing nation, treasuring and protecting our material and spiritual heritage and customs and developing our creative talents throughout our lifetimes, and employing our skills and knowledge for economic development for our common good.

One of the valuable gifts our creator has endowed us as a human species is the ability and to consciously think and actively play out our thoughts with deeds. The display of culture is another element that is shaped within our spiritual realm and naturally evokes our physical activism. Cultural events are human pinnacles that bring to the fore identities of a nation, a society, a community and a tribal group. It is at cultural festivals where people gather to demonstrate and share their traditional practices more openly and closely, putting aside their political and social status, and displays a high level of tolerance, mutual respect and understanding.

The responsibility of Government is to identify, develop and promote the material and spiritual culture and heritage of Namibians for the purpose of nurturing national pride and identity. The Namibian citizens individually and collectively enjoy the rights and privileges of taking part in cultural practices.

Director of Ceremonies

Today marks another historic day of the many events and functions in our nation that contributes to the upliftment of the lives of our people. I stand here today with awe and admiration as I reflect on the journey Namibia has travelled and continues to travel in her quest for a consolidated and developed nation state.

An Annual National Cultural Festival, as witnessed by us today, has grown exponentially beyond the expectations and scales that make this event truly a national event. This festival is one of the exercises defined by direct involvement of citizens on their own volition without the coercing by government and other forces. Cultural practices takes on a natural phenomenon driven by an innate and necessary desire for an individual to discover and find purpose for existence. The Festival is an organized platform that brings together the entire nation to express itself. In expressing themselves collectively, the nation enhances her shared goal of unity. Unity serves as a pillar and bridge for the execution of all developmental agendas for the communities, society and the nation.

It is at events such as this that people grow to appreciate and respect each other as they discover their commonalities. The commonalities are elements of social bonds serving as strong measures to integrate intellectually, socially, politically and economically. The integration is a prerequisite to the maintenance of peace and stability for the nation.

Culture is an intricate practice that encompasses first and foremost knowledge. It is based on beliefs, and displayed through arts, morals, laws, customs, and through abilities, capacities, capabilities and habitual norms acquired and adopted by a person and by a member of a society. These are necessary attributes that form part of human needs which people must perform.

Culture is a phenomenal practice that does not necessarily have a permanent and a fixed feature, nor is it limited to space or time. It is for this reason that a Ministry dealing with social programs such as culture was created to ensure that this element of social consciousness is accorded attention in all its manifestation.

Director of Ceremonies,

This year's festival features 90 traditional cultural groups with each made up of 15 individual members. In total, 1300 of Namibia's best traditional performers have gathered here today to celebrate the 20th National Culture Festival. The National Culture Festival has become one of Namibia's annual flagship events since 1995.

Over the past eighteen years, we have developed criteria around which group are assessed by an independent panel of judges and the annual National Culture Festival has been, in the past, devoted exclusively to traditional culture dancing. This year, major modifications have been applied to extend the festival to a holistic traditional cultural festival that offers:

- traditional cuisine, in the sense of the food like oshigali, evanda, isoto, lihonyo and others
- traditional medicine
- traditional attire and crafts, among others

The National Culture Festival taking place here at the Keetmanshoop Stadium marks 20 years of celebration of Namibia's diverse cultures and heritage. Cultural diversity flourishing within a framework of

democracy, tolerance, social justice and mutual respect among people of various cultures is indispensable for citizens of our nation.

During the colonial apartheid era, culture was misused effectively as a dichotomy to divide our people. We must, therefore, spare no effort in building bridges and using culture as a pillar of strength to unite our people. As a nation with diverse cultures, unity remains and will ever be the central feature of nation building. Our convergence here today and for the next three days, must enhance our understanding for each other as one people. The Festival must be a hallmark for unity in diversity that creates the first conditions for peace which is a precondition for our development.

Director of Ceremonies

Cabinet mandated the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture to explore and implement the economic potential of our rich and diverse cultures.

The need to incorporate culture as a strategic element of intervention for poverty reduction and a spring board for sustainable development is highlighted by the United Nations and Africa Union instruments dealing with culture, including the 2005 United Nations Convention for the protection and promotion of diversity of cultural expressions to which Namibia is a state party.

The safeguarding of both our tangible and intangible cultural heritage is fundamental to our identity. However, we should be mindful that culture has the potential to reap economic benefits for our people. Therefore, we must explore all avenues to capitalize on diverse culture as a strength to market Namibia and to market our products and services. I am aware and have noticed that the display of traditional cuisines and herbal medicines, to mention just a few, in the exhibition tents erected here, these are not only for showcasing our creative talents and indigenous knowledge but they are also an indication of the treasures that can be transformed into income generation commodities. On a large scale, they

can significantly improve our economy and contribute to nation building.

The SWAPO Party Government has undertaken to progressively revitalize culture festivals in order to respond to current demands and trends that address both the spiritual and physical needs.

Director of Ceremonies

I wish to express my gratitude and appreciation to the hundreds and thousands of traditional performers, practitioners and custodians who continue to take part in the promotion and safeguarding our cultural heritage by participating in constituency clusters, district and regional festivals all over Namibia from 1995 to date. Your hard work and dedication is evident in all corners of our beautiful land –on farms, in villages, settlements, small and big towns.

I urge you to continue the hard work and I appeal to all Namibians to take part in their cultural activities and to uphold traditional values and customs. We should ensure that our children and grandchildren practice our rich cultures for many years to come.

I now have the pleasure and honour to declare the 20th Annual National Culture Festival officially opened.

I thank you.