STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY HIFIKEPUNYE POHAMBA, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA ON THE OCCASION OF THE OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF THE NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS ACTION PLAN

9 DECEMBER 2014

WINDHOEK

*Check Against Delivery
Director of Ceremonies,
Esteemed Advocate John Walters, Ombudsman of Namibia and President of the International Institute of Ombudsman,
Honourable Dr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, Speaker of the National Assembly,
Honourable Magaret Mensah-Williams, Deputy Chairperson of the National Council,
Honourable Ministers and Members of Parliament,
Esteemed Med Kaggwa, Chairman of the Uganda Human Rights Commission and Commissioner of the African Commission for Human and People’s Rights,
Esteemed Musinga T. Bandora, UN Resident Coordinator,
Your Worship Muezee Kazapua, Mayor of the City of Windhoek,
Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Distinguished Invited Guests,
Members of the Media,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to be here this morning, on this important occasion marking the launch of the National Human Rights Action Plan.
As you are all aware, Namibia as a sovereign state was born out of a brutal and dehumanizing colonial past where our people were subjected to the worst atrocities against human kind for more than a century. During German colonization, our people were subjected to a genocidal extermination campaign.

The architects of the despicable apartheid policy in South Africa extended that racial policy to Namibia to ensure white minority settlers domination, while relegating the majority Africans to a life of hardship and poverty, and at the same time, subjected them to untold atrocities. Indeed, Africans were deprived of their political freedom, forcefully removed from their land and were made slave labourers in their own country of birth.

Basic human rights and fundamental freedoms were denied to our people. It is against this grim background that the people of Namibia rose up to resist both German and apartheid colonialism, which culminated in the struggle for freedom and national independence.
Directors of Ceremonies,

The colonial repression inspired the formation of the National Liberation Movement, SWAPO, under the leadership of our Founding President and Father of the Nation, HE Dr. Sam Nujoma and many other compatriots, to resists and fight for our freedom and the liberation of our motherland. The struggle for national independence was indeed long and bitter. Many of our heroes and heroines sacrificed their precious lives fighting against apartheid colonialism and subjugation.

On 21 March 1990, Namibia became a sovereign state. This was a glorious day when, as a nation, we removed the burden of apartheid colonialism and embraced the future with a sense of optimism and anticipation for a better life for all our people.

The Namibian Constitution, in its Preamble underlines this promise as follows, and I quote:
“We the people of Namibia constituted the Republic of Namibia as a sovereign, secular, democratic and unitary state, securing for all our citizens justice, liberty, equality and fraternity”.

Chapter 3 of our Constitution further underlines this commitment through the entrenchment of fundamental rights and freedoms, which lay the foundation for the establishment of a society based on democratic governance, dignity, social justice, liberty and equality. I can proudly state that Namibia has since independence ratified or acceded to the most important International and Regional Human Rights Conventions and Treaties.

Director of Ceremonies,

The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted at the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, Austria, in 1993, recommended that, and I quote –

“Each State considers the desirability of drawing up a National Action Plan identifying steps whereby the State would improve the protection and promotion of human rights”.
In line with the Vienna Declaration and our Government’s commitment to adherence to international standards of human rights observance, the Ombudsman of Namibia was tasked with the responsibility of facilitating the development of Namibia’s 1st Human Rights Action Plan, way back in 2009.

In this context, a National Human Rights Conference was held in May 2009 to kick-off the process.

It is important to note that promoting and protecting human rights is a continuous process. Therefore, it would be naive to expect Namibia to resolve all its human rights challenges within a short time frame. As such, the National Human Rights Action Plan should be viewed as an essential part of a long-term and continuous planning process.

The fundamental purpose of an Action Plan is to improve and safeguard the promotion and protection of human rights in our country. For this reason, we all share in the challenge to improve human rights observance.
However, it must be recognised that many elements of the programme of activities articulated in the Action Plan may not be put in place overnight.

It is my considered view that any planning exercise should embrace the values of broad-based and comprehensive consultation process involving all relevant key stakeholders. This holistic approach ensures that the necessary human and financial resource requirements are met to realize the deliverables outlined in the plan.

I have been informed about the Programme of Consultation Workshops which took place in Windhoek, as well as workshops that took place throughout Namibia to solicit comments and inputs from Governmental Agencies and the nation at large. This will go a long way in ensuring that the Plan is not just viewed as a Government tool, but that most importantly, it would be owned by the Namibian people who will actively participate in its successful implementation.
I am also informed that in developing the Human Rights Action Plan, a Comprehensive Baseline Study, which included a Household Survey, was carried out in order to identify gaps that need to be addressed.

The 2015-2019 Five-Year Plan focuses on areas that need immediate attention. These include education, health, housing, land, water and sanitation, access to justice and the right not to be discriminated against.

Director of Ceremonies,

I would like to highlight a few measures proposed in the Plan that coincide with Government’s ongoing development programmes. At the core of the Plan is the implicit objective to empower the people of Namibia through public education and awareness campaigns, with the view to put increasing emphasis on access to quality public service.
The emphasis placed on regulatory and legislative reform under each section also resonates with Government’s ongoing efforts to repeal outdated and, in many cases, discriminatory legal and policy instruments, and to review and introduce new and appropriate legislative and policy instruments.

Director of Ceremonies,

The Plan places emphasis on partnership, with prominent roles envisaged for various Governmental agencies, as well as Non-Governmental role players. The Plan makes explicit reference to vulnerable groups in our society for whom deliberate measures are proposed. These include women, children and people with disabilities.

The multi-sectorial and multi-partner approaches and interventions envisaged in the implementation of the Plan confirm Government’s interest in strengthening a Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) approach to achieve development objectives.
In this regard, the roles foreseen for traditional authorities as well as regional and local authorities show that we are committed to the promotion and protection of human rights in Namibia at all levels of our society.

I urge all Offices, Ministries and Agencies of the Government, especially those designated as lead and supporting institutions for the implementation of the National Human Rights Action Plan, to ensure the allocation of the necessary financial and human resources required to effect its successful implementation.

In the same breath, I urge all Government Offices/Ministries/Agencies to grant full support to the Office of the Ombudsman during the implementation of the National Plan on Human Rights.

As we all know, any plan is only as good, or bad, as its implementation. Namibia will not be able to fully reap the benefits which this Plan has to offer, if we cannot successfully implement it.
Therefore, the implementation of this Plan should be done in the same participatory and consultative manner in which it was developed.

As a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council, Namibia is expected, at all times, to lead by example on matters related to respect for, and promotion of human rights. The development and implementation of the National Human Rights Action Plan will serve as further testimony to our Government’s commitment to honouring its international and national human rights obligations.

It is now my distinct honour to declare the National Human Rights Action Plan officially launched.

I thank you.