

## **Remarks**

**By**

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**7<sup>th</sup> Annual Research Conference on the theme: “Poverty  
Eradication, Citizenship and Community Empowerment”**

**Faculty of Humanities and Social Science**

**University of Namibia (UNAM)**

**Windhoek, Namibia**

Hon Bishop Zephania Kameeta, Minister of Poverty Eradication and  
Social Welfare

Prof. K.Mchombu, Dean, faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Members from the UNAM community

Members from the civil society

Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

Allow me to first express my gratitude to the Dean of the Faculty of  
Humanities and Social Sciences for the invitation to address this  
conference on poverty eradication.

This request could not be more timely as, His Excellency Dr. Hage  
Geingob declared a ‘*war on poverty and inequality*’ and created a

Ministry of Poverty of Eradication and Social Welfare to spearhead efforts in this regard and we in the UN have pledged support in this effort.

*Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen*

I have been in this position for a little over a month and seize every opportunity to spread the message that Namibia has a positive story to tell on development even though Namibia still has unfinished business to attend to. Since the Millennium Declaration was signed in 2000, the country has succeeded in halving poverty much ahead of 2015. The number of poor people in Namibia has been reduced from seven out of every ten people at independence, to three out of every ten people at the moment.<sup>1</sup> Progress has also been made in primary education enrolment, which currently stands at over 99%. Namibia ranks third in the Education for All Development Index; 84% of the population has access to safe drinking water. Progress has also been made in the fight against Malaria and TB, with malaria mortality and morbidity reduced by over 90 percent since 2000 and TB cases dropping by 22% since 2013. New infections of HIV have also been reduced by 50% since 2001.

However, with a Gini coefficient at 0.59<sup>2</sup>, inequality is still high in Namibia. Poverty levels are higher in rural areas as compared to urban centers. Female-headed households, older pensioners and subsistence farmers are disproportionately affected.<sup>3</sup> In some regions more than 50 per cent of the population lives below the national poverty line. Mobile populations and rapid urbanization are also an exacerbating factor.

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<sup>1</sup> 28.7 per cent of the population of Namibia lives below the national poverty line (Namibia MDG Interim Report 2013)

<sup>2</sup> NDP 4

<sup>3</sup> Namibia MDG Interim Report 2013

One in every three people, in Namibia, is unemployed, with youth unemployment as high as 52 per cent.<sup>4</sup> Hunger and malnutrition remain a serious concern, (24% of children under five are stunted) as is the vulnerability of people to drought and other climate-related shocks. Coordination gaps still remain in the implementation strategic interventions at all levels.

### *Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen*

This past Monday, I was privileged to attend the launch of the first regional consultations with Minister of Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare, Honorable Minister Kameeta to identify solutions to persistent issues of poverty and inequality in Otjiwarongo. This consultation process, scheduled to take place in all 14 regions, is being held to ensure that the voices of a wide range of stakeholders, including national and regional government bodies, traditional authorities, civil and faith based organizations and private sector, will be heard. This will help inform the development of a national poverty eradication framework.

The people of Otjiwarongo spoke freely and forcefully, and among the key messages conveyed was the fact that people want to be empowered and they know that “once empowered, they will remain empowered”. Among their requests was that government services should be brought to the constituencies so that the little resources they have are not spent on transport to access basic items such as birth certificates and identification documents. That employment creation, especially in rural areas, is critical if we are to stop rural outmigration and the expansion of informal settlements in urban areas.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid

The challenge to government and institutions such as the UN and universities such as yours is how to meet the needs of the people.

Where are the opportunities for us to join this fight?

*Distinguished Guests, Sisters and Brothers*

Later this month, in New York, Heads of State and Government will adopt the new development agenda to guide actions over the next 15 years. This agenda, which has the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at its core, calls for global action to eradicate poverty and to save the planet.

The UN can bring together knowledge and expertise, and the United Nations Country Team stands ready to support Namibia and the University to carry out these noble tasks, to provide tools, and relevant policy guidance.

The post-2015 development agenda, with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, will be instrumental in translating Namibia's poverty eradication aspirations into action. However not all these goals will be relevant for Namibia. What role will the university play in researching and guiding the Government of the Republic of Namibia on which goals to prioritize, which goals will be fit for purpose, and how the goals will be integrated in the mainstream development agenda, national planning, policy, budgets, law and institutions. Integrated institutions that are effective and human resources equipped with the skills and capacities to deliver sustainable development will be required. As a leading center of knowledge, the university can and must play a key role in this war against poverty.

The experiences and research results of the University together combined with the support from the UN family among other stakeholders suggest that Namibia can eradicate poverty by 2030 by strengthening social policies, scaling up implementation and multi sector coordination of its plans.

Winning the war on poverty is a difficult, but not impossible, task. After all, despite all the odds, this country fought and won a war of national liberation!

What we have collectively learnt through practical experience in Namibia and global best practice leads us to pass three key messages:

1. That knowledge of what causes poverty and who are the people most at risk of becoming or remaining poor is essential if we are to make a difference and be the generation that relegates poverty to history.
2. That academic institutions such as UNAM have a critical role to play in the generation of knowledge that forms the foundation of evidence-based policies and response strategies.
3. Successfully eradicating poverty is not the sole responsibility of a single line Ministry. It requires strengthened coordination through a multi-sectoral approach, particularly at the local level.

I take this opportunity to challenge the university to focus its energy in building evidence based, action oriented, research that will generate these ideas and produce high quality policy notes that will

not only uplift those who are extremely disadvantaged, but drive a high level agenda on poverty eradication.

We should all be conscious on the need to build a nation where as Honourable Minister Kameeta emphasized, Namibia will be a nation where poverty has no place but has been completely eradicated, falling from 3 out of every ten Namibians, to zero out of every ten!.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate that the UN stands ready to support the UNAM, and the Government of Namibia in its efforts. The UN therefore pledges to work with researchers, academicians, students and administrators as part of a collaborative effort to generate data and knowledge for successful poverty eradication interventions.

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen, we in the UN share in the vision of a prosperous and empowered Namibia, a Namibia where poverty and inequality are things of the past and wealth creation, employment generation and a skilled and motivated youth lay the foundations for our common future. I look forward to working with you to turn this vision into a reality.

**Tangi Unene!** (I thank you!)