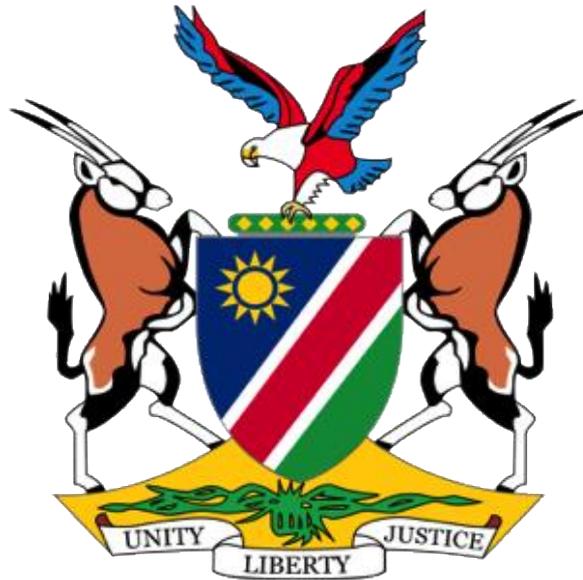


Republic of Namibia



**STATEMENT BY MS. DAISRY MATHIAS,
PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR: YOUTH MATTERS & ENTERPRISE
AT THE NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL BOARD RETREAT**

VON BACH DAM

19 FEBRUARY 2021

Hon. Agnes Tjongarero, Minister of Sport, Youth & National Service
Sharonice Busch, Executive Chairperson
Board of Directors of the NYC
Director
Invited Guests,
Ladies & Gentlemen,

I extend appreciation to the Board of the National Youth Council for the invitation to participate at this inaugural retreat. Congratulations on your elections and appointment, as Executive Chairperson, Sharonice Busch and as respective Board Directors, entrusted with the fiduciary responsibility of stewarding the work of the National Youth Council, to discharge its mandate which I will later speak to, in greater detail.

I have been invited to share a few thoughts on the Landscape of youth politics and developments, which I believe to be a relevant focus area for the incoming Board, in a rapidly evolving socio-political context.

The broad-based and inclusive design of the NYC is a model to other countries in the region, and has been referenced and replicated by many others, as a best practice benchmark.

If there is one thing I have learnt, during my first term and now into my second term at the Presidency, where my role is primarily to coordinate intra-governmental stakeholders to realize the vision of His Excellency the President – it is this – “Leaders deliver through institutions”. Regardless of the political will and policy priorities and initiatives undertaken by a leader, be it the Head of State, your sector Minister and even yourselves as the Board of the NYC – Leaders deliver results through strong institutions. This is why Effective Governance to improve public service delivery has been and remains a Critical Success Factor and strategic focus area for this Administration. This is why a big focus of our work together with the line Ministry, has been capacitating our Agencies with the necessary capacities to discharge mandate – expertise and critical skills; empowering policy frameworks and resourcing to implement. For the most part, for the NYC, the Hon. Minister has achieved the first two objectives – Having delivered a Cabinet adopted 3rd National Youth Policy as your guiding strategic framework and also, having presided over and provided guidance at the concluded General Assembly, which elected you into Office.

I wish to pause at this juncture to reiterate, that we believe in you, as young people with potential, and as Patriots, to be our hands and feet – our Partners in advancement of Youth Matters in our Country. Again, I reiterate that the President and Minister, our

Government is counting on You to steward this organization to its highest potentialities.

Executive Chair/Directors;

You assume responsibility at a pivotal time in our country's socioeconomic and political trajectory in general, and evolving youth movement, in particular. You are entrusted to provide leadership to the Council and to Young people across the nation, against the back a myriad of social, economic and political challenges. These include:

- Pervasive inequalities in income, wealth and opportunities for employment;
- Government as shareholder is challenged with countless SOE inefficiencies, which undermine our ability to deliver public services and attain developmental objectives.
- The economy is operating in a global context of weakened commodity prices, causing declining revenue inflows and subdued economic performance.
- Sovereign Ratings have been downgraded owing to monetary policy peg to the Rand, making it more expensive to borrow Capital.
- You are further aware that in terms of Fiscal Stability: we are managing the deepest Fiscal Deficit since independence of 17bill and a Debt-to-GDP ratio of up to 70% this FY, due to high Public Expenditure, including the wage bill – in which you and I are enumerated.
- You assume national leadership at a time when the Drought plunged households into food and job insecurity and vulnerability. Agricultural sector shed tens of thousands of jobs up until 2019 and we hope recent rains will restore productivity.
- You assume leadership as our partners in development, during a raging global Pandemic that has spurred a Public Health Emergency and economic crisis.
- Effects of the pandemic have accentuated inequalities and as young people we experienced first hand the digital divide and ICT deficits that persist in Education and also the prevailing deficits in Urban land and housing delivery.
- As leaders we have observed the changing Electoral patterns and declining margins and also the intensification of actors in a multiparty, pluralistic democracy.
- We are following the heated legislative discourse on bread and butter matters affecting the quality of lives of our fellow citizens; and as young people and leaders, we have witnessed the devastating effects of Corruption and breach of public trust on the national psyche.
- As leaders, these are some of the things that keep us up at night. But these are also the solutions we must design and implement – together. I am certain and without exception, that we feel and understand the grief, the economic stress, anxiety and uncertainty and frustrations; but also the hope and determination to overcome – that is embodied in our Young People.

We are leading in times of adversity and no doubt, our collective leadership will be tested. I encourage you to lead, with empathy, to lead with urgency, to be consequential and to be the leaders that you wish to see in Namibia today.

Executive Chair/Directors;

Let me know turn attention to the mandate of the NYC. I believe the critical question that must be answered as an outcome of this Retreat, is "How can the Council support youth-led organisations and movements and help them to do more?"

The mandate of the Council, according to the Act, includes:

- fostering among Namibian youth a spirit of national identity, a sense of patriotism, unity, self respect, and awareness of social, economic, political, educational and cultural prospects and adversities;
- encouraging literacy and artistic activities among the youth;
- establishing and maintaining relations with international and multilateral youth bodies and youth structures;
- mobilizing funds for youth development;
- initiating youth development projects, programmes and activities with the aim of encouraging the active participation of the youth;
- developing the inherent abilities and capabilities of young people

Over the term, I have observed patterns and trends in the Evolution of the youth movement in Namibia. I was appointed on 29 June 2015 and just one week in Office of July 2015, the land grab happened at the famous or infamous Kleine Kuppe Plot – giving rise to AR and the renewal of youth led social activism in Namibia.

In my view, there is room for activism, and activism does not necessarily represent a DIVIDE between young people and Govt – it is infact a necessary part of a vibrant and functioning democracy. Every democracy requires healthy dose of scrutiny and discourse, to hold elected leaders accountable and in this regard a young majority has a meaningful role to play. Social Media has also transformed rapidly over the 5 years and provided a platform not only for mass mobilization as witnessed through the Arab Spring, but also a platform to disseminate weaponized lies under the age of disinformation and misinformation, but Donald Trump better described as Fake News. But we should remain mindful though that where the rights of one person end, the rights of the other begin and so we cannot discuss social media, without honest reflection on absence of Digital Rights in our country.

The way young people are organizing themselves, is evolving and so should we, to remain relevant to the constituents we serve. We saw during the first COVID19 lockdown how youth organizations led the response and mobilized food parcels, sanitizer and water solutions and help to vulnerable communities. The #ShutItAllDown movement and hashtag landed a youth-led petition in Parliament for debate and culminated in a Summit with the Head of State. The Kids got to the State House without being recognized affiliates to the formal and recognized structures. If the Kids can gain captive audience directly with national leaders and shape and lead the discourse and make front page news, without the springboard of the Council – as the foremost advocacy platform for young people in the country – we must pause to reflect and regroup.

It is a fact that there has been an intensification of actors, in local youth politics, as a microcosm of the national political spectrum. It is my view that young Namibians are more integrated and connected to one another than before. At the touch of a fingertip, even the most remote rural youth can get the latest gist.

What this means for you, as the incoming leadership of the NYC is that you must focus on deepening your network of collaborators, by engaging, working with them, supporting and creating necessary conditions that will allow young people to play a more active role. We must open up and relax the rigidity of formal structures. We must become less insular and more inclusive to remain relevant to an evolving, more informal, faceless movement.

We should be intentional to recognize leading youth voices + bring them into the fold of the NYC by providing relevant structures and platforms. Build on the unique convening role of the NYC and mandate to represent and serve young Namibians, as a:

- partner
- source of support.
- Convener
- Action Catalyzer
- Amplifier
- Bridge Builder, facilitating intergenerational dialogue
- National Advocate and Mobilizer

The policy framework is there to guide you:

- NYPIII
- HPPII
- Professionalising Youth Work
- Financial sustainability

- Youth Development Fund

At a more appropriate opportunity we can delve into the detail of these national documents to highlight direct prospects for the Council. That is however not what I was requested to speak on today.

In Closing, EC and esteemed Directors of the National Youth Council,

Next to corruption, I have seen another evil that diverts public resources intended for development. Infighting and over politicizing national institutions, deflects a lot of time and energy that should be directed to serving the young people and moving our common youth agenda – forward. This is your time, to make a difference. To rise above the noise and be the difference. I implore you to resist the retrogressive tendencies of tribalism, ethnicity, nepotism, racism, sexism and to never embroil yourselves in factional politics. Define behind a common vision for the NYC and unite behind it and fight for it and deliver on it.

Effective Governance has been the hallmark of this Administration, as condition sine quo non for development. We will govern and lead effectively, when we establish robust processes and systems, to build strong institutions. Some may argue things have deteriorated under our watch. I argue that it is because of the President's stance on transparency and accountability that things are seeing the light of day.

Remember – that Leaders deliver results through strong institutions. Let this be your legacy as the newly appointed Board at the helm of this important and strategic national institution.

I affirm, that we will be right here to guide you and support you, every step of the way.

Thank you