



**REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT**

DEEPENING DEMOCRACY IN SADC: A YOUTH PERSPECTIVE

By Ms. Daisry Mathias, Presidential Advisor: Youth Matters & Enterprise Development

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President Hage Geingob has had a busy start to the year 2019, seized with matters of national development and regional peace and security in the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

On 19 and 24 January 2019, respectively, Namibia celebrated alongside the People of Madagascar and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), as they inaugurated their democratically elected leaders and fashioned a relatively peaceful transition of power. Fairly credible elections were conducted and in both cases, peace hung in the balance, as voting outcomes were challenged in the Courts. It was a defining moment to witness the deepening of democracy in these two nations that have been characterized by coups d'état. For the DRC to have held elections is a success in itself, while the attendance of all former Presidents of Madagascar at the inauguration sends good signals. For SADC, the political pendulum has swung in favour of peace, stability and constitutional democracy and this is a milestone.

As SADC Chairman tasked to steer regional development, President Geingob provided steadfast leadership to the collective effort to bring parties together, to agree on the development and implementation of an electoral calendar and electoral roadmap, which facilitated the holding of national elections in the DRC in December 2018. True to his consultative nature, President Geingob called a Double Troika Summit on 17 January 2019 to consult on the political and security situation in the DRC. (A Double Troika is a meeting of incumbent, former and incoming Chair of SADC, and incumbent, former and incoming Chair of the Organ on Politics, Security and Defense). An outcome of this facilitated dialogue

was the SADC Common Position, which observed the principles of subsidiarity, national sovereignty and respecting the constitution and territorial integrity of the DRC.

One of the ranging consultation methods employed by President Geingob is quiet diplomacy. His credentials as a freedom fighter, diplomat, international civil servant, skilled negotiator, administrator, consensus builder and respected Statesman, have garnered him rapport among colleagues and he has, in a short period of time, cemented brotherly bonds with a number of counterparts in the region, continent and world. This camaraderie has served the President well, as he consults colleagues via direct line, in the wake of a crisis. **President Geingob believes strongly in consultation and building consensus, as an avenue for decision-making and building trust.**

As young Africans, it is vital to take note of the SADC Chairman's principled argument in the case of the DRC, which aimed to defend and not compromise on the principles of sovereignty, democracy and governance, in a time of crisis. President Geingob postulates that credible processes, systems and institutions are fundamental for effective governance and once endorsed, processes should be permitted to run their course. Where found wanting, these processes, systems or institutions should be strengthened, rather than undermined. These convictions should come as no surprise considering President Geingob was SWAPO Director of Elections (1989), Chairman of the Constituent Assembly that drafted the Constitution of our Republic and founding Prime Minister of a transitioning government, tasked to establish Namibia's governance architecture. He is a leader whose entire **youth, adult and intellectual life has been predicated on the design of nation building and effective governance.** Building "an inclusive, united and prosperous Namibian House", within the context of a regional SADC neighbourhood, has been and remains his single-minded mission.

The emerging cohort of youth leaders have a lot of valuable and empowering lessons to learn from President Geingob's vision of 'A New Africa' where more countries embrace democracy with its culture of free and fair elections, respect for fundamental human rights, good governance and political tolerance. A New Africa where there are no more coups and other unconstitutional changes of government. A New Africa where the African Union plays a more dynamic role in solving African problems and is at the forefront of pushing the African youth development agenda. A New Africa where former Presidents retire with dignity.

Namibia, a harbinger of modern democratic systems, fully embraces the concept of a New Africa.

President Hage Geingob has befittingly declared 2019 the 'Year of Accountability', as Namibia prepares for elections later in the year, as do South Africa, Botswana, Mozambique and Malawi. With Madagascar and DRC successfully behind us, seeming post-electoral conflict in Zimbabwe has undone the very gains made following their unprecedentedly peaceful 2017 elections. It is an appropriate moment to reflect on progress made and prospects for the future.

Twenty-eight years into democracy, our country Namibia has gained ample experience in its political, social, economic and constitutional life. We have achieved a great deal - freedom, peace, stability, social cohesion and greater prosperity. Since independence, Government has lifted 600,000 (NSA, 2016) Namibians out of poverty. Not least among our challenges is the stubbornly high level of unemployment, which entrenches poverty and inequality. Peaceful transfer of power is, therefore, essential for socio-economic development. The war against poverty, in pursuit of economic transformation and prosperity for all, is hinged on the prevailing peace and stability, while recognizing that peace cannot be sustained where inequalities persist.

In Namibia, the legacy continues. The generation of liberators who ushered in the present era is still among us, providing leadership to navigate the complexities of geopolitics and transferring to the youth the fundamentals for effective governance. This is the legacy we are now beneficiaries of and we should understand it and strive to build upon it, or risk recklessly rubbishing it.

In SADC, democracy is deepening, but work must continue to strengthen and safeguard democratic political institutions and processes at all levels, so as to accountably and efficiently deliver public services and build trust. Every democracy requires a healthy dose of scrutiny and candid discourse, in order to hold elected leaders accountable, and in this regard a young demographic majority has a meaningful role to play. It is incumbent on the youth to assume responsibility and play an active and enlightened role in this process, by contributing insights, knowledge and expertise towards the consolidation and strengthening of our democracies. **Doing so with courtesy and congeniality will only increase the prospects of our views enjoying maximum attention and respect.** Tomorrow does not just happen; it must be designed and now is the time to build on these fundamentals to construct *The Africa We Want*. /End