



**REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT**

**DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION:
EMPOWERING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS**

By Ms. Daisy Mathias, Presidential Advisor: Youth Matters & Enterprise Development
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Demographically personified, the median age in Namibia is 21, black and female. This youth bulge and demographic transition presents an opportunity to adapt the political profile of the country to become more representative. Namibia has scored important successes in terms of youth political participation, ranked among the top ten countries in the world (9th out of 183 countries) with a score of 0.881 by the Commonwealth Youth Development Index.

Over the term President Hage G. Geingob has maintained the pipeline of political appointments from the SWAPO Party structures. In 2016 SWAPO Party Youth League's (SPYL) Paula Kooper and Veikko Nekundi were appointed to Parliament on the President's list of eight nominees. In 2019, President Geingob appointed three youthful Party cadres as Governors for the Kunene, Erongo and Otjozondjupa regions in the persons Marius Sheya, Neville Andre Itope and James Uerikua, respectively. In January 2020, SPYL Secretary Ephraim Nekongo was sworn in as a Member of Parliament, albeit only until lapse of the 6th Parliament on 20 March 2020.

Moreover, in December 2020, to strategically position young Namibians at the helm of Namibia's international relations and cooperation, President Geingob appointed the youthful Julia Chanduru-Imene, Elvis Shiweda and Mekondjo Kaapanda-Girrus as Ambassadors to Switzerland, Senegal and Belguim, respectively. Not to omit my own novel appointment on 29 June 2015, among President Geingob's team of Presidential Advisors. This innovation has been benchmarked as a governance best practice, later emulated by the African Union through the appointment of a Special Youth Envoy.

The appointment of 22-year-old law graduate Patience Masua to Parliament on 22 April 2021 by the President, comes a little over a year since the historic appointment of Emma Theofelus to Parliament and into Government as Deputy Minister of Information & Communication Technology. These exceptional cases reaffirm the

President's commitment to creating pathways for more young Namibians to enter national structures of governance and decision-making processes.

All these appointments, past and present, ensure representation of a vast demographic segment and underscore President Geingob's commitment to inclusivity as a cardinal principle. By appointing a dynamic cohort into the Legislature and Executive Organs of State, three tiers of Government and multilateral fora, the President is delivering not only on the wishes of the Namibian people, but also granting exposure while infusing national institutions with the innovation, energy and inspiration of young participants.

The SPYL provides a formidable platform for the progression of young Party cadres into the Body Politik and decision-making structures of the mother-body. SPYL leaders are elected through Congress and further contest through the Pot, to make it onto the Party list for Parliament. As Head of the SWAPO Party, the President is authorized to nominate ten people from the rank and file to the Party list, including women, youth and elders. The practice within the Party has always been the intentional capacity building of young cadres for the purposes of succession planning and instilling SWAPO Party values into their consciousness. Youth leaders who show potential are filtered through the system. The incumbent Prime Minister is testament to this fact, while Ministers Peya Mushelenga, Pohamba Shifeta, Albert Kawana have risen through the ranks to full Ministerial portfolios; while among others Natangwe Ithete, Kornelia Shilunga, Veno Kauaria and Heather Sibungo progressed to become MPs and Deputy Ministers.

As Head of State and Government, the President is the champion of the national reconciliation and nation-building project. To this end, his list of eight Parliamentary nominees is reserved for the inclusion of critical skills and demographics, not limited to political affiliation. The appointment of Masua, a student leader and SWAPO Party member of Tswana and Coloured descent, sparked debate on the perceived exclusion of youth leaders serving in Party structures. Such narrative is not only a weak attempt to delegitimize the contributions and allegiance of others, it also fails to capture the essence of the President's intent – which is to build an inclusive, united and prosperous Namibian House.

We must guard against perpetuating a culture of "politicism" where politics is the hegemonic driver of development, at the expense of multidisciplinary leadership. Drawing distinction between political patronage and merit is a false option as both are essential. Let us not harbour resentment but rather embrace the values of resilience, hard work, discipline and remain focused on public service delivery.

The premium placed by President Geingob on the equitable political and economic participation of women and youth, is proven beyond rhetoric. My advice to young

leaders is to “Care less about who you want to be and more about the change you want to effect”. Begin where you are, with what you have and influence through results, providing indispensable service at all levels of our society.

Our country is undergoing transition. Young Namibians will inherit the social, economic, political and governance infrastructure. The recognition of one among us, should be celebrated as a collective triumph. Let us rally behind peers and support their work to effect real change on the issues we care most about. We stand a greater chance of success when we fight our battles collectively.

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