



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

**OPENING STATEMENT BY HON. DOREEN SIOKA,
MINISTER OF GENDER EQUALITY AND CHILD
WELFARE, NAMIBIA**

AT THE CEDAW 61ST SESSION

Palais de Nations
16 July 2015

The Chairperson of the Committee

Honourable members of CEDAW Committee

Distinguished observers

Rapporteurs

Ladies and gentlemen

First and foremost, let me convey the gratitude of the Namibian government, for the opportunity that is given by the Committee for the country to share progress that was made since the last report presented to the Committee. Before I deliver the statement, I would like to introduce the Namibian delegation as follows:

- I am Doreen Sioka, the Minister of Gender Equality and Child Welfare and Member of Parliament, and I am the head of the delegation
- H.E Ambassador Sabine Bohlke-Moller, Namibian Ambassador to Switzerland and Permanent Representative to United Nation and other organisations.
- Ms Martha Mbombo, the Acting PS of the MGECW, spearheading the technical, leadership, managerial and administration of all programmes in the Ministry including Gender programmes
- Advocate Bience Gawanas, Special Adviser to the Minister of Health and Social Services on policy and operational issues
- Dr K. Kahikwata, Deputy Director Ministry of Education , Arts & Culture, Directorate of Programme and Quality Assurance responsible for special education and ensuring that the government implement inclusive education system
- Followed by Mr Shipoh, Director responsible for the implementation of Gender Equality and research programmes in the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare

Madam Chair, Namibia was not in a position to bring along a representative from the Ministry of Justice or from the Office of the Prosecutor General due to a schedule of court cases lined up for the month of July 2015. However, we have consulted the said institutions and we also have on board the necessary information that will be used to clarify the implementation of the Convention and where not possible, we will revert to you with the necessary answers.

Madam Chair, Members of the Committee, Namibia is committed to defend human right and protection of human dignity as provided for in the Namibian Constitution. Furthermore, I wish to point that Art 66(1) of the Constitution provides that “both the customary law and the common law of Namibia in force on the date of independence shall remain valid to the extent to which such customary law or common law does not conflict with this Constitution or any other statutory law.”

Namibia wishes to highlight its commitment in line with the CEDAW as follows:

1. On Cultural and traditional practices:

While the people practice many positive cultures as part of their heritage and identity, we acknowledge outdated and harmful cultural practices that continue within our society. It is for that reason that the Namibia Constitution recognises customary law only if its inconformity with the Constitution. Therefore do not see any harm promoting positive cultural practices whilst at the same discouraging and criminalising harmful practices.

2. On Law Reform and Development

Law Reform is a process that involves research, consultation, drafting and ultimately the adoption of the law. This process involves various stages in law making as well as multiple role player and stakeholders. Namibia is facing a challenge in the law reform process due to higher staff turnover and increased number of bills and researches are not finalized on time.

On Gender equality and empowerment programs

1. Since the submission of the report under review, the government revised the National Gender Policy of 1997 and has now a new National Gender Policy (2010-2020) with 12 areas of focus. For the purpose of effective coordination implementation of the Policy, it also adopted the National Coordination Mechanism. This coordination mechanism ensure that all stakeholders are includes as government believes in multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder involvement.

Madam Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen, regarding Women in politics and decision making

2. Namibia for the first time in its history saw an increased number of women elected to Parliament/National Assembly during the November 2014 national elections. Due to political commitment of the Ruling Party which amended its Constitution to achieve greater gender representation of its women members in Parliament. It also acknowledged the role played by women within the Ruling Party as well as advocacy civil society organisations for 50/50 representation. The country recorded an increase of women in Parliament from 25% to 47%, which was also in adherence to the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development that calls for at least 50% of women in politics and decision making positions by 2015, good governance and citizen participation by 2015.

Namibian Cabinet consist of 25 Ministers and out of this, 7 are females (Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of International Relations and Cooperations; Minister of Home Affairs and Immigration; Minister of Higher Education, Training and Innovation; Minister of Education, Arts and Culture; Minister of Urban and Rural Development and the Minister of Gender Equality and Child Welfare)

Namibia is proud of this achievement, although we admit that this will be judge against improvements in the overall Welfare and wellbeing of all our people and serve as role models for younger women to emulate.

As part of the induction of new Parliamentarians, the MGECW and MFA jointly organised a seminar for the women who were elected to go to Parliament from 9 – 14 March 2015. The seminar's theme was "Enhancing the effective participation of Women Parliamentarians in Namibian Politics." The objectives of the seminar were:

- a) To coach and mentor women in leadership and decision making with requisite skills (in assertiveness, advocacy/lobbying, networking and self-management) necessary for self and collective advancement.
- b) To facilitate a platform for women in leadership to network and to mutually support each other for collective women's empowerment in Namibia such as through a mentorship process among others.
- c) To take women through basic gender concepts and gender mainstreaming to enable them to be articulate in their discussion in Parliament; and to be aware of important international, regional and national instruments (laws) in regard to gender equality and women empowerment.

Madam Chair,

3. The Government continue to be concerned about GBV that one of the most prevalent human rights violations in Namibia. Hence, the Government in collaboration with key stakeholders (government's line ministries, civil society and other stakeholders) and the support of development partners, relaunch the revised Zero Tolerance media campaign on gender based violence on the 10th July 2015.

Male involvement in GBV Initiative

Another initiative is a special programme created to embark upon sensitisation of men on GBV and its effects on the society. This activity is being carried out with the collaboration of various stakeholders, especially men organisations. Meetings are held countrywide for men and by men to advocate respect for the rights and dignity of women. Sometimes being attended by men only and at times by both men and women.

Education and Girl Child

4. The National Conference on Education held in 2011 adopted a resolution to realize free and compulsory primary education as set out in Article 20 of the Constitution. This resolution became effective as from January 2012 and today Namibia's children attend primary school free of charge. Another is that of parental contribution to School Development Fund at Secondary Schools was still a barrier to some learners with regard to retention and completion of their secondary education. Therefore, the Government took a bold step of offering a tuition free secondary education, no payment hostel fees at primary and secondary levels and no examination fees at national examination as of January 2016. Government availed funds for implementation. Furthermore, discussions are underway to work towards having a tuition-free enrolment at the Namibia College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) for youth who are re-writing their Grade 10 and 12 at this institution.

Madam Chairperson,

5. Allow me to indicate that as a direct result from the National Conference on Education (2011), the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture has appointed Life Skills Teachers at schools. Life Skills as a subject in our curriculum touches on many aspects such as gender and sex including respect for each other; influence of technology on society including gender-based violence; abuse and neglect, bullying, peer pressure, stigmatization, risky sexual behaviours, alcohol and drug abuse; criminal behaviours, responsible parenthood, date rape, violence, just to mention few of the themes.

6. However, it has been realized that we need to create a culture of respect, inclusivity, care and support in our schools. Thus, the Ministry in collaboration with UNICEF is working on developing a National Safe School Framework with strategies that can inform inclusive, caring and supportive practices to enhance school safety of learners and the physical, social and emotional well-being. Issues such as harassment, aggression, violence and bullying would be addressed under this national framework.

7. With these few remarks, Namibia is looking forward to an interactive deliberation and guidance towards the protection and care of our women and girls, by eliminating all Form of discrimination.

I thank you Madam Chair
