

Speaker's Media Briefing: Review of the year 2003

The review of the year 2003 will highlight the following aspects:

1. Speakers 'Activities-2003

One of the highlights of the Speaker's activities throughout the year has been the Speaker's Annual Regional Trips.

The Honourable Speaker of the National Assembly, Dr. Mosé P. Tjitendero, visited eight Regions of Namibia as part of his initiative of "Taking Parliament to the People" as from the 4th of August to the 3rd of September 2003.

The primary objective of the visit was to familiarize the people at the grassroots level with the legislative structures of the country, with the aim to allow the governors, regional councillors, community leaders and traditional leaders to engage in meaningful exchanges with the Office of the Speaker, and to create a broad based understanding of the roles played by the citizenry in a parliamentary process while focusing on the legislative structure to improve the communication between the citizens and the elected representatives. The visits enabled the Speaker to interact with the people at the grass roots and learn about the situation in each region.

Through his presentation, the Hon. Speaker stressed the importance of the participatory role of the electorate in the Parliamentary process. Apart from electing the Members of Parliament, the electorate can influence the law-making process through lobbying their elected representatives, political parties, and the media. Alternatively, the electorate can attend and participate in Public Hearings held by the committees of Parliament, and can

also hand in petitions to Parliament to give their views on an issue of importance.

He went on to explain how the public can access the Parliament of Namibia, through using information communication technology, by visiting the Parliament of Namibia website: www.parliament.gov.na . The Mobile Training Unit (MTU), popularly known as the "Classroom on Wheels" accompanied the Honourable Speaker to enhance the demonstration on how to obtain information on Parliament through the Parliament website.

Parliament-Online is a tool specifically designed to increase Parliament's ability to reach out and the public's ability to make input into Parliamentary process. The MTU addresses the challenge of access to Parliament-Online by taking technology to places where infrastructure and electricity does not exist.

Commenting on the newly established Continental Parliament, the Pan African Parliament which will sit for the first time on the 31st January 2004, the Speaker informed the communities that Namibia will be represented by five Parliamentarians.

The Honorable Speaker visited the following Regions:

Otjozondjupa Region:	Otjiwarongo – 4 August 2003 Gam – 2 September 2003 Tsumkwe – 3 September 2003
Oshikoto Region:	Tsumeb – 5 August 2003
Ohangwena Region:	Eenhana – 6 August 2003
Omusati Region:	Ruacana – 7 August 2003 Ombalantu – 8 August 2003
Omaheke Region:	Gobabis – 12 August 2003 Talismanus – 13 August 2003 Aminius – 14 August 2003
Hardap Region:	Gochas – 15 August 2003 Gibeon – 16 August 2003

Erongo Region: Okombahe – 18 August 2003
Arandis – 19 August 2003

Caprivi Region: Katima Mulilo – 25 August 2003

During the interaction with various communities it emerged that certain issues like the land question, water and food shortage caused by the drought and the uncertainty about the status of the National Council as the Second Chamber of the Parliament of Namibia, took center stage.

During the visits the Hon. Speaker donated one computer to each of the following communities: Ruacana, Gam, Talismanus, Okombahe, Aminius and Gochas. Previous donation of computers was made to Ovitoto, Okakarara, Ondangwa, Rundu and Khorixas.

To further demonstrate on how information Communication Technology can enable closer linkages between the community and their elected representatives; the community in Katima Mulilo gathered and witnessed the discussion between the Speaker and the Right Honourable Prime Minister, Theo-Ben Gurirab who was in Windhoek, via video conferencing.

It is hoped that through these annual regional visits, the communication process would be better facilitated so as to narrow the information gap between the citizens and their elected representatives.

2. Legislation passed by the National Assembly-2003

The vision of the Namibian Parliament is to promote and uphold a strong and dynamic parliamentary democracy by passing laws, which best serve the interests of the Namibian people. In so doing, members in the National assembly agreed to and passed the following bills during the year 2003:

- Medicines and Related Substances Control Bill
- Anti-corruption Bill
- Magistrates Bill
- Appropriation Bill
- Namibia Sports Bill
- Namibian Constitution Amendment Bill
- Agricultural (Commercial Land Reform Amendment Bill)

- Petroleum Products and Energy Amendment Bill
- Geneva Conventions Bill
- Electoral Amendment Bill
- Higher Education Bill
- Teachers 'Education Colleges Bill
- Transfer Duty Amendment Bill
- Payment System Management Bill
- Local Authorities Amendment Bill
- Agricultural (Commercial) Land Reform Second Amendment Bill
- Criminal Procedure Amendment Bill
- Magistrates Amendment Bill

3. Projects initiated and completed by the National Assembly

The following are some of the major projects that have been initiated and completed by the various Directorates/Divisions within the National Assembly.

- A basic introductory computer course was offered to Members of the National Council. It is an ongoing process and Members of the National Assembly will be trained next year.
- The merging of the Parliamentary Committees was adopted in the Standing Rule and Orders Committee.
- As part of its initiative of taking Parliament to the people, Parliament visited two schools, one in the Khomas region and another in the Otjozondjupa region, with the Mobile Training Unit (MTU) to use Information Technology (IT) as a tool in the promotion of democracy and the enhancement of the citizen's participation in the parliamentary process. This is an on-going project and it will resume during the first quarter of the year.
- Other initiatives include: Parliament's participation in the Ongwediva Trade Fair, Literacy Week event in the Capital and the participation in the Windhoek Agricultural Show.
- The other vital project which is underway is the construction of ramps at the entrance of the Parliament building to facilitate in assisting the physically challenged to have access to the

building. The Ministry of Works has been requested to conduct the feasibility study and determine the cost implications attached to this project.

- The various Parliamentary Committees have had public hearings in the Regions of the country to acquaint the citizenry about some very important bills and to get their contribution and participation into these crucial bills.

4. Cooperation between Parliament and other strategic Institutions

Parliament has entered into agreements with vital institutions which are aimed at improving democracy and citizen participation in the democratic process. One of such institutions is the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI). Since its inception in Namibia in 1995, the Institute has placed considerable focus on the structures of Parliament, working with both Houses of Parliament.

NDI's assistance is aimed at enhancing the institutional development of Parliament through professional training and skills development of members and staff in effort to enrich the oversight functions of the legislature. Most importantly, NDI's assistance to Parliament is based mostly on the envisaged sustainability model and its underlying principles which include:

- Sustainability through collaboration and increased delegation and transfer of roles and responsibilities to Parliament;
- The enhanced transfer and development of skills within Parliament and other partner institutions to sustain and continue implementing the work of NDI. To this end, two staff members from the National Assembly, one staff member from the Ministry of Regional and Local Government and Housing and another member of staff from the National Community Radio Network, a project of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) have been seconded to NDI. This team is responsible for the implementation and the strengthening of the legislative process.
- Maximum mobilization of local resources by strengthening smart partnerships, between different institutions of government, the private sector, civil society organizations and the donor community.

The Namibia Community Radio Network (NCRN) and the Namibia Media Women's Association (NAMWA), in collaboration with NDI has established a radio and video production studio to enhance the efforts of Parliament to reach out to the communities, through the Constituency Channel. The Constituency Channel team has been assisting Parliament in various activities such as:

- Speakers trip to the regions
- Signing agreement with Microsoft, South Africa
- Speaker's ambulance at Ovitoto
- Covering US Congress men courtesy meeting
- Speaker's trip to the USA
- Video conferencing between Speaker and the Regions on the envisaged Pan African Parliament
- Video Conferencing Speaker and the Prime Minister.

NDI has been instrumental in facilitating the Microsoft partnership agreement with the government of the Republic of Namibia. Through this partnership, Microsoft have donated 4000 computers which will be installed in all schools throughout the country, a computer refurbishment centre and the establishment of Technology Academies country -wide.

5. Parliament/Microsoft Computers For Schools

This project is in full swing. The Project has seen the inauguration of a school in Okahandja and Rehoboth. Computers have been installed in three schools in Katima Mulilo. The other eight schools have been wired and computers will be installed in January 2004 when schools reopen.

In addition, by the end of February 2004, six (6) Community Learning Centers will be established throughout the country. Three centers will be based in schools while three will be located in communities. The Centers will each be equipped with 20 computers and a server and staffed by two trained personnel.

A refurbishment center will be established at an appropriate location. The center will serve as producer of computers for schools throughout Namibia during the implementation of the African Pathfinder project.