

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

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STATEMENT BY THE HON. THEO-BEN GURIRAB, MP
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, INFORMATION AND
BROADCASTING
AT THE
NCC STAKEHOLDERS WORKSHOP
ON THE DRAFT COMMUNICATIONS BILL
SAFARI HOTEL CONFERENCE CENTRE

WINDHOEK

29 MAY 2002

Director of Ceremonies,

H. E. Mr. Kevin McGuire, Ambassador of the United States of America,

Mr. Bob Kandetu, Chairman of the Namibian Communications Commission,

Other Commissioners,

Ms. Diana Swain, Mission Director of USAID,

Dr. Tina Dooley-Jones, Director Technical Programmes of USAID,

All stakeholders,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I welcome the stakeholders, our invited guests, and distinguished visitors, to the “2002 workshop on the Namibian Communications Bill.” It took us almost two and a half years since the adoption of the *Telecommunications Policy and Regulatory Framework for Namibia* to reach the stage where we now have a draft Communications Bill on the table. Concerns were expressed about the slow progress, but with communication playing such an important role in the economic growth and development of the country, we had to make sure that we address all relevant issues and that we comply with regional and international conventions that regulate this vital sector globally.

I am pleased to see all of you. Your presence here today is a clear testimony that you share our Government's determination to ensure that this draft Bill that is up for discussion will indeed become the driving force behind the socio-economic development and the provision of communication services to all the Namibian people, especially those in the previously neglected areas.

It is my pleasure to welcome you here as we witness the beginning of Namibia's long overdue journey to cross the digital divide and to participate in a new era of economic development in Namibia and the world.

Allow me also to express my sincere appreciation to the Ambassador of the United States of America, H.E. Mr. Kevin McGuire, and to the representatives from USAID for their untiring and continuous support and encouragement in the process of policy and legislation development. USAID has been assisting SADC Member States since 1996 to formulate policies and regulatory frameworks for the development of communication services in the region. Upon the completion of the Namibian Policy document in 1999, USAID immediately became involved in the development of the country's draft Communication Bill. It is its generous technical and other forms of assistance that have contributed greatly to the drafting and finalization of the Communications Bill on the table today. Your

assistance throughout these years is much appreciated. I do, therefore, trust that you will not leave us alone after the completion of this stage. We hope that you will stay with us to see the process through Parliament and to assist as well with the implementation when we reach that stage.

Mr. Ambassador,
NCC Commissioners,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have invited here today, stakeholders representing a cross section of the Namibian Information, Communications and Technology (ICT) sector, ranging from representatives of the wireless operators; the ISP owners; fixed line providers; the chamber of commerce; the tourism industry, small business operators, educators, community activists and others.

You have come here as operators, competitors and users of information, communication and technology services. Moreover, we have invited you as partners in Namibia's future economic and technological development and growth.

You the operators, the private sector, and community representatives, are being asked to “partner” with government in a joint effort to develop policies and programmes that will stimulate advancement in the Namibian communication sector and help us promote better access to communication services for all Namibians. A vibrant and competitive communication sector can serve as an engine and a catalyst for overall socio-economic growth and development in our country.

The Internet operators and private sector alike are not only expected to compete with each other, but they must also “cooperate” with each other and with the regulator. This spirit of public sector/private sector cooperation will be a key to the successful growth and development of the information and communications sector in Namibia.

When I refer to the communication sector, I refer to local, long distance, and international voice services, both fixed and wireless; satellite and radio operations; high speed data services; and access to the Internet.

It would be futile to define, or try to limit the definition of communication to any particular class of services since technology continues to evolve and change. Indeed, it was not very long ago that the idea of telephony over the Internet seemed far-fetched.

I am not at all an expert on economic theory, one need not, however, look too far to see the impact of an open and competitive communications market on a country's overall economic performance. The most obvious impact of a competitive communications market is lower prices and a greater range of services and goods available to the public. Data from developed countries suggest that the direct contribution from this sector to overall GDP and GDP growth quite impressive and growing.

But it doesn't stop there. A vibrant and competitive communications sector can lead to indirect contributions to other sectors of the Namibian society and economy, including in the fields of transparent governance, education, healthcare, tourism and commerce.

Embracing information and communication technologies (ICT) is a worthy goal, one that all Namibians should strive to achieve. We in Government must cooperate with the private sector to enhance the pace and promote together the way in ICT growth

and development. Many of you are aware of the financial demands and resource constraints facing our Government. That is why we stress partnerships and mutually beneficial relations with all our friends in the world. That's why NEPAD is important for Africa and for Namibia.

However, the Government must and can play a vital role in the development of communications by defining a clear "vision" and creating a predictable "roadmap" for ITC growth in Namibia. Government's vision for the development and growth of the communication sector cannot be static, but rather, it must continually evolve to meet changes in the market place, changes in technology, and changes in the society.

Mr. Ambassador,
NCC Commissioners,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Against that backdrop, I want to share with you our present vision of the development of the communication sector in Namibia.

Today, our primary vision for its growth is to create and nurture an economic and regulatory environment in the country that will attract private investment in Namibian businesses and infrastructure; create market opportunities for large and small entrepreneurs; create and nurture a highly skilled and trained local work force; and provide a level playing field for all operators that will encourage new growth across all aspects of the ITC sector.

By creating such a hospitable environment for ICT, we increase the likelihood that its development will take hold and grow quickly in Namibia.

Critical to accomplishing our primary vision is to put in place a regulator that is transparent, independent and accountable. Both the operators and the public must perceive the regulator as impartial and empowered alike. The regulator should do its best to foster a partnership of cooperation with operators and the public, but also act swiftly and decisively to implement sound public policy and promote the public interest.

Our vision for the sector's development also includes many other worthy public interest goals as well. For example, Namibians from all sectors of society and in all regions of the country should have access to affordable communication services including telephone and access

to the Internet. Operators, the private sector and government must join in the search to find ways to bring affordable communication services to our rural and underserved communities.

Government and the private sector should also strive to promote greater usage of communication services among a wider segment of the Namibian society. We should encourage novel applications or use of these services in education, healthcare, tourism, and conservation of our natural resources. Both societal and economic opportunities are surely to arise through greater use and penetration of these services throughout the population.

Finally, the private sector and Government must take the lead in promoting the use of ICT services in e-commerce. Much of the business that we conduct today, whether over the phone or in person can be conducted much more quickly and efficiently over the World Wide Web. Whether you are doing online banking, or marketing and selling your valuables to a global Internet market, the savings in time and money and efficiencies created by e-commerce may be well worth your efforts.

Today, I have shared with you some of the Government's vision for the growth and development of the communication sector in Namibia. I invite and encourage you as stakeholders to provide your feedback, your observations, your comments concerning not only the legislation, but also the vision and direction of the development of the communication sector in Namibia.

I wish you fruitful deliberations and trust that your inputs will further enrich the Draft Communications Bill for the Republic of Namibia.

I Thank You.