

**Remarks by Hon Erastus Endjala on the occasion of the joint launch of the
Mobile Training Unit and the MRLGH Website on November 30, 2001**

Dear Honourable Chairman of the National Council, Kandy Nehova,
Dear Honourable Minister of Regional and Local Government and Housing, Nickey Iyambo,
His Excellency Ambassador Kevin J. McGuire, US Ambassador to Namibia,
Honourable Members of Cabinet present here,
Honourable Members of Parliament,
Honourable Governors,
Honourable Regional and Local Councillors,
Your Excellencies Members of the Diplomatic community,
USAID Director, Diane Swain,
Respected Leaders of the NGO community,
Esteemed Delegates,
Members of the Press,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I feel honored to have the privilege of saying a few words about the National Democratic Institute (NDI) support program to the Namibian government. It is most appropriate that I elaborate in short about the NDI, because this joint launch we are witnessing tonight was motivated by the fact that both projects enjoyed support from NDI. Most significantly, we are building linkages amongst ourselves because of our individual relations with NDI.

The partnership between the Namibian Parliament and NDI started in 1995, on the invitation of the Namibian government, through the United States Agency for Development (USAID). The focus of this program was to assist the Namibian government in the establishment of its democratic institutions, specifically Parliament. This partnership, characterized by mutual respect and understanding continued into the 21st Century. This year this partnership has entered its sixth year and continues to grow from strength to strength because of the common values of democratic practices that the Namibian Parliament shares with NDI.

The NDI leadership in Namibia, as typified by several Directors, amongst them Ms Erin Martin, Mr. Gene Guerero, and currently by Adv. Achieng Akumu, has served the Namibian Parliament with distinction. During their reign, Members of Parliament and staff benefited from workshops, seminars, meetings, staff attachments and study tours. At these fora, Members of Parliament and Staff benefited from qualitative presentations by experts in the fields of legislation, committees operations, research and parliamentary procedures.

As a Member of Parliament, I wish to single out some of the workshops/seminars and study tours that I consider of great and special importance. The workshops on: bill analysis, committees operations, Standing Rules and Orders, research, parliamentary procedures, and study tours to other Parliaments left an imprint on my mind. Members of Parliament can only be effective and efficient in their work if they are armed with the necessary tools to perform their work. Those tools were aptly provided by these platforms. In order to suggest amendments to bills, Members are expected to understand the content of bills, hence the suitability of a workshop on bill analysis. Exchange visits to other Parliaments enabled Members of Parliament and staff to broaden their perspective on parliamentary work and were exposed to different and contemporary methods of performing parliamentary duties. At these encounters cross-pollination of ideas around parliamentary democracy and transparent government naturally unfold and later on impact on policy formulation and legislative practices of the Namibian Parliament.

One area that is gaining prominence in recent times is Information Communication Technology (ICT). Once more, with NDI at the side of Parliament, the Parliament computer

network was established as early as 1996. With the establishment of the computer network an advanced tool of communication was added to the traditional methods of communication. Financial, material and human resources were not in short supply, because our trusted partner, the NDI donated a server and several computers to ensure the training of Members of Parliament and staff and for the storage of electronic information.

Today, the Namibian Parliament prides itself of being one of the few Parliaments in Africa that have functional websites. The Launch of the Parliament Mobile Training Unit is one practical example of the technological strides that the Namibian Parliament is making in utilizing ICT to expand the concept of democratic governance. This new project obviously needs to be properly institutionalized, take root in the regions to ensure its proper utilization.

It is therefore quite disturbing to have learned that NDI is to wind up its operations by June 2002. Though great things have been achieved during the period of the NDI program, much more need to be done in the consolidation of our democratic institutions. Can we really say with confidence that our people participate actively in the legislative process? Are we not jeopardizing the investments we made by winding up the program while some projects such as the constituency outreach program, are still in infancy stage?

Mr. Ambassador, you have witnessed a sustained and mutual partnership, you have witnessed the US taxpayers dollars at work and I am sure that you will agree with me that we are putting it to good use. Therefore, I humbly request you to do everything possible to ensure an extension of USAID support to the Namibian Parliament. We do not wish to see the withering away of our democratic institutions due to insufficient investment. As a nation, this is a threat to our peace and stability and therefore also a threat to world peace. Let us ensure the participation of the most ordinary citizen on developmental processes, only then can we truly say we live in democratic societies.

To NDI staff, our true partners in our efforts to foster democracy continue the good work!

I thank you