

NALAO INTEGRITY SYSTEMS WORKSHOP,

18-19 FEBRUARY 2002,

OPENING SESSION (9.00-9.45)

NAMPOWER CONVENTION CENTRE, WINDHOEK

WELCOMING ADDRESS BY US AMBASSADOR KEVIN MCGUIRE

Mr. Chairman and honorable participants: I am truly delighted to be here to help open NALAO's Integrity Systems Workshop. Let me start by congratulating you all on the outstanding organization of the meeting and commend you for the choice of topic, one that is extremely relevant and timely to Namibia at this point, - Integrity Systems at Local Government level. The US Mission in Namibia is proud to be associated with your efforts to address this topic.

As we all know, good government in its most visible and concrete form begins at the local government level. At the heart of local government is the effective, reliable and timely delivery of quality services. Transparency and integrity are integral to high quality service delivery. Together they contribute to improved performance levels, better operating systems and more cost-effective procedures.

Conducting public business in an accessible, open and inclusive manner has other advantages as well. It demonstrates respect for citizens and regard for their concerns. It also creates the openings for civil society input and oversight that are the cornerstones of democratic principle and good practice.

Increased civil society participation, in turn, contributes to the development of the democratic ethos that is evolving in this country and, by creating a culture of accountability and trust, enhances the credibility, and thus the stability, of government.

Equally important is the fact that a culture of transparency and business-like professionalism is a crucial element in attracting and keeping private sector investments (both local and foreign), and in securing much-needed economic growth. In fact, the link between good governance, integrity and economic development is, direct, strong and irrefutable.

Just as good governance is one of the keys to political stability and broad based economic growth, corruption, its opposite, has grave political consequences and can distort or deter economic growth:

- Corruption leads to a loss of faith in the government, and undermines the legitimacy of governments;
- Corruption subverts democratic values and political equality, perpetuating discrimination and economic disparities;
- Corruption raises the costs of doing business; discourages new ideas and innovations; promotes inequality among firms; leads to a reduction in the quality of products, and diverts funds from investment and other productive activities that should spur economic development and growth.

Namibia continues to receive positive ratings on all international and regional indices that measure transparency, accountability and levels of integrity across countries. The

Anti-corruption Bill presently before Parliament underscores the importance the government of the Republic of Namibia accords the issue. The seriousness and thoroughness with which Namibia is willing to address the potential problems sends important signals to the country's citizens and to potential investors.

The workshop that NALAO is conducting over the next two days also supports efforts at maintaining Namibia's good reputation and excellent record. Through your collaboration with other Namibian organizations, you will be linking what is taking place at national level with your local bases and translating general principles into a concrete, workable program of action for your home communities.

Apart from this, you will be reaffirming your commitment to your constituents by demonstrating that your primary focus is on continuing to make an impact where it is most needed - at the local level, in ways that affect people's everyday lives.

Let me congratulate you on this initiative and wish you luck in your undertakings.

I thank you.

Kevin McGuire

United States Ambassador to the Republic of Namibia