



Opening remarks by

Adv. Notemba Tjipueja, Chairperson of the Electoral Commission of Namibia on the occasion of an engagement workshop for Civil Society Organisations

Thursday, 24 October 2019

Safari Hotel, Windhoek Namibia

Director of Ceremonies, Commissioner Evaristus Evaristus;

Dear Fellow Commissioners;

The Chief Electoral and Referenda Officer of ECN, Mr. Theo Mujoro,

Distinguished Representatives of various Civil Society Organizations and Non-Governmental Organisations;

ECN Staff members present

Members of the Media;

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you all this morning at the Civil Society Engagement Workshop, here at Safari Hotel. The ECN has a number of stakeholders and considers civil society organisations as one of the most important partners in the electoral process.

The main objective of this workshop is for the Commission to update the civil society organizations (CSOs) and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) on the ECN's preparedness for the forthcoming Presidential and National Assembly elections.

Equally important, the workshop also serves to afford an opportunity to CSOs and NGOs to provide their input in relation to the forthcoming elections. In this regard, the specific objective is to create a platform for dialogue and exchange of ideas between the ECN and the CSOs and thereby promoting public confidence in the electoral process and systems.

The workshop will also reflect on the current voter and civic education strategies of the ECN. As you might be aware, the ECN is the custodian of civic and voter education in Namibia as part of its mandate. However, the Commission has always maintained the view that the ECN alone cannot satisfactorily fulfil this mammoth task without assistance from other stakeholders. Indeed, civic and voter is one area in which the CSOs and NGOs have always made a huge contribution through partnerships with the ECN by supporting the wide dissemination of electoral information through your expertise in civic and voter education as well as vast networks connections at grassroots level.

Director of Ceremonies

The theme under which this year's general election are being held is: "Promoting Inclusive Participation". In light of this, the ECN is focusing on achieving full participation of every eligible individual in society who is eligible to vote. The theme also implies that there are issues concerning political inclusion and social exclusion that warrant the promotion of inclusive participation. Social exclusion is usually associated with lack of equal opportunities resulting from discrimination, alienation or disenfranchisement of certain individuals or groups. Social exclusion (or social marginalization) takes place when certain groups in society are socially disadvantaged and relegated to the fringes of society.

The workshop should thus reflect on and articulate the concepts surrounding the principle of full participation, including the constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression of all citizens, participatory rights, representative institutions, guaranteeing of civil and political rights of citizens, impartiality and non-discrimination. A political system can only be considered democratic to the extent that its leaders are selected through fair, honest and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Inclusive participation is likely to be achieved by adherence to various principles of democracy, including credible and regular elections held on the basis of universal, equal and secret suffrage so that all voters can choose their representatives in conditions of equality, openness, and transparency that stimulate political competition; Accountability which entails a public right of access to information about the activity of government, the right to petition government and seek redress through impartial administrative and judicial mechanisms; Satisfying the basic economic needs of the most disadvantaged, thus ensuring their full integration in the democratic process; decentralization, which makes it possible to broaden the base of public participation; A culture of ethics, transparency, appropriate norms and procedures must be established to uphold these principles of democracy. Furthermore, effective civic education is required to inform the public about the rights of a responsible citizenry.

Ladies and Gentleman,

At this juncture, allow me thus to highlight the expected outcomes of this workshop.

- Firstly, at the end of the workshop the CSOs and NGOs should be fully updated and conversant with the important dates and programs of the 2019 Election Calendar;
- Secondly, civil society actors are expected to be made fully aware of the ECN's civic and voter education programs and strategies;
- Thirdly, valuable input is expected to be provided to the ECN by CSOs for the upcoming elections, which the ECN may consider in their operational plans for the elections;
- Fourthly, improved CSOs confidence in the electoral process should have been achieved at the end of the workshop.

In addition, we should be well-informed in dealing with fake news and misinformation. In the context of elections, fake news has the potential to undermine the integrity of elections (and ultimately, democracy itself) because it is written and published with the intent to mislead and to deliberately damage the reputation of an agency, entity, person, in order to gain financially or politically at the expense of the democratic process. Therefore, the much anticipated presentation by the Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) should enlighten us on how to deal with disinformation (fake news) and misinformation.

In conclusion, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The role of CSOs and NGOs as service providers, advocate/campaigner, watchdog and grassroots mobilizers, is generally recognized. The Commission is absolutely convinced that a vibrant democracy needs civil society engagement and participation. I would, therefore, urge all the participants to engage in frank discussions and exchange ideas, and to contribute freely during the debates and deliberations.

At the end of this workshop we need tangible inputs from civil society, which the Commission undertakes to consider for incorporation into the ECN's operational plans. Your highly-valued input can only bolster the Commission's preparedness as we collectively approach the forthcoming 2019 elections with confidence.

With those few words, I hereby declare this Civil Society Engagement Workshop officially open.

I THANK YOU.