

Statement by Mrs. Martha Namundjebo-Tilahun, President of NCCI on the occasion of a media briefing on the work on the Chamber during 2014

Windhoek, 2014

Thank you the director of proceedings at this briefing for the opportunity to address the media on a few issues related to the work of the Chamber during the year 2014.

It gives me a great deal of delight to welcome our distinguished members of the media to this briefing. These types of engagements between the NCCI leadership and the media will become a regular feature on the Chamber's calendar of activities from now on, as it is a platform for the NCCI to communicate various activities and to articulate the Chamber's position on various key topical issues of concern to the Namibian economic players.

As we just celebrated the twenty-fourth anniversary of our independence two weeks ago, let me begin by congratulating His Excellency, President Hifikepunye Pohamba, the Government and people of our country for the wonderful achievements we have made over the past twenty-four years of our independence and freedom. Namibia prides itself as a nation which fought very hard and made supreme sacrifices to overcome many odds and achieve self-determination and freedom. We take pride in having maintained peace and political stability which laid a very strong foundation for sound investments and economic growth which we have enjoyed as a nation for the past 24 years.

The Namibian business community therefore applauds the political leadership of this country for remaining true to the objectives of our liberation struggle and the ideals upon which our Republic was founded. They worked tirelessly and unwaveringly to ensure that our country remains politically stable and peaceful while creating a sound policy and legislative environment which allowed businesses to thrive and grow.

While we have every reason to celebrate almost two and a half decades of our independence with a great sense of pride and achievement, we remain fully aware of the pressing challenges facing us which require undivided attention from all stakeholders going forward.

Although our economy has been growing steadily, the number of unemployed fellow citizens, especially the youth remains stubbornly high and poverty is still at very worrying levels. Having established and maintained strong economic fundamentals, we should now take practical steps to arrest unemployment and make a serious dent into unemployment. It is important to focus on developing and tangibly supporting local enterprises so that they are given the space they need to grow and create employment opportunities.

I get very worried when I hear that Government and some private companies continue to procure goods and services from outside suppliers while Namibian suppliers are being overlooked. If media reports are anything to go by, the policy of procuring from local suppliers as far as possible seems to be simply a policy spoken about in political statements but with little or no consequences for those found to be violating such policy. This is against the spirit of supporting local enterprises in order to achieve the type of growth which we need to register to sufficiently address unemployment and poverty.

The Chamber is determined to work with our Government to address issues which we see as obstacles to the growth of enterprises in this country thereby making the environment conducive for business growth and employment creation. But Government also needs to agree to engage the Chamber as the cross sectorial business representative organisation in this country. Our engagement with Government cannot just be limited to the Ministry of Trade and Industry, which I must say have been a strong and reliable partner to the private sector over the years. But we would like to see our engagement elevated to the entire Government because the issues which we should be discussing are affecting Government Offices, Ministries and Agencies beyond the Ministry of Trade and Industry.

The private sector has created its own structures through which it wants to engage and work with stakeholders as a collective. It is a very bad practice from stakeholders to work with the private sector outside the structures which the private sector itself has created. At times I get puzzled by manner in which some consultations are made through individuals with close links to specific leaders who cannot claim representation of organised business instead of making use of structures such as the Chamber which represent over three thousand enterprises in this country.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is appropriate for me to use this platform to inform you about the activities of the Chamber during the course of this year. We began the year by reviewing the work of the Chamber in preparation for the crafting of a new five year strategic plan which we hope to implement with the incoming national leadership to be elected during our next Annual General Meeting in June.

One of the key strategic objectives which we are determined to achieve in the next two to three years is to work with Government and other stakeholders to make Namibia as the number one country to do business in Africa and to improve our competitive ranking on the World Economic Forum competitive index. Our recent survey within the private sector has clearly shown that the private sector is very unhappy about the fact that we have been falling in many international rankings and we are determined to have this situation changed fast.

The most significant reason for Namibia to remain behind is because we have not been making sufficient and bold reforms aimed at reducing bureaucratic bottlenecks and creating efficiency within our system in order to make doing business in Namibia less costly and more profitable. The bureaucratic bottlenecks which have been identified will have to be dealt with swiftly with a view to eliminate inefficiency in the system. This will be the single biggest focus of the NCCI leadership in the next two to three years and we will leave no stone unturned in our quest to achieve this.

Our strategy going forward will also involve the repositioning of our brand so that it can reflect the diverse and wide nature of our mandate and purpose. It will also involve the review of the membership categories as well as the benefits and services for our members going forward. The Secretariat has been hard at work towards the new business strategy and brand repositioning of the Chamber and we hope that these will be key discussion points at our AGM later this year.

During the past month or so some of our branches have been holding elective branch Annual General Meetings and in terms of our constitution, branches have until end of April to hold their AGMs and have new branch leaderships elected. These AGMs at branch level will feed into the

national elective AGM in June at which very crucial strategic decisions will be made. I therefore want to urge all our branches to ensure that their own local AGMs are held in a peaceful atmosphere and that proper preparations are made so that we can have meaningful participation of branch representatives at the national AGM.

Let me conclude by thanking you for making time to join this press conference. I hope that you will make use of the information provided here and at future press conferences to inform the public about our activities.

I will now take questions if there are any. I thank you!