



**OPENING STATEMENT BY THE
HON. DR THEO-BEN GURIRAB, MP AND
SPEAKER OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
AT THE SECOND SESSION OF THE
CHILDRENS' PARLIAMENT**

6 MAY 2008

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**Director of Ceremonies,
Hon. Minister of Education,
Excellencies, Lady Ambassadors, High
Commissioners and Representatives,
Esteemed Representative of UNICEF,
Invited Guests and Presenters,
Fellow Namibians,
Media Representatives,
Girls and Boys,**

I will have ample opportunity later on to thank speakers, experts, presenters and sponsors for your gracious assistance and encouragement. You have done so in various ways for us to be able to bring these young people to Windhoek and this Chamber. The National Assembly would not have been able to do this without your support.

As times and environments we live in change, so also new things happen in our lives. And they demand attention and action. Between last year, when the First Session of the Children's First Parliament met, and now, many things have happened, good, bad and ugly. In spite of that life continues. Even so we must pray and hope

that misfortune will spare us and that better days will follow. To that end, we must keep hope alive and holds hands together as a family.

This year, during the month of March, our country, people and many families, including my own lost some loved ones. With that our Parliament has been deprived of its best, pioneering and dedicated, past and contemporary members. Our nation too has sustained the same devastation. We are still mourning because the impact has been heavy.

That's why our Government honoured some of the departed with national heroes' funerals and eloquent eulogies. Again, my old schoolmate, dear friend and comrade, Joe Ithana has passed on yesterday. Joe was the husband of our Minister of Justice and Attorney-General Hon. Pendukeni Ithana. I ask you all to rise and join me in observing a minute, in silent prayer and meditation, in their honour. May their souls rest in eternal peace.

Let me now welcome all of you to this Chamber, while I take note of the fact that you are more in

number this time than last year's attendance. I am happy about this and commend my support team of organizers for doing the right thing and keeping my big idea on track.

I embrace you all, as veterans and as newcomers who will be veterans next round. After everything is said and done, I want you and your successors, during each time of coming together, to claim a shared ownership of this process. It is an open-ended initiative which involves everybody. Think of it as our teamwork, indeed as work in progress.

You should think of these gatherings, within periods of your involvements and contributions, as innovations and as a testing ground. When you look back to these moments, from wherever you might be in the future, you should be proud as pioneers and bricklayers of this initiative. Your ambitions, thoughts, instincts and achievements should then bear witness to what we do as a collective today and about the personal changes that many of you would have undergone. In essence by realizing your own dreams, pursuits and successes.

Each generation of youth and children are called upon, by circumstances of their times, to think, plan and act in ways that will transform their hopes and actions into practical realities. Future is always full of challenges but also of opportunities. Those who prepare themselves to become winners usually tend to reach their goals than others who rely on lucky chances without sweat. Each morning and each day present a moment for planning. It is not enough to wish for success and tomorrow's better life without preparation, focus and action.

Girls and Boys,

Life does offer light at the end of the tunnel but also deep holes of doom at the same time. Armed with will and determination to act makes a difference between the two. Empowerment has two sides. One is a good fortune of having rich parents and supportive community. The other is to be poor without role models and to be in a hostile environment which is against you.

Some of us know both sides, even though, in my case, I came from the latter yet made it. You may say, but why are you not Bill Gates? My answer would be but he is a school drop-out. Your response might be so? I would then say, I agree. But I will still add, I was over the years one of the authors of the Namibian Constitution, President of the historic UN General Assembly Session, Prime Minister and now Speaker which he will never be. But so much for that. Today, knowledge, information and communication, Bill Gates being one of the pioneers, have created unlimited opportunities in the world for daring entrepreneurs, students and parliamentarians alike in transforming the global community in helpful ways by changing their mindsets.

Today, a poor man's daughter or son with a drive has virtually equal chances to succeed as those of rich parents in this globalizing world. Everyone starts out young and feels insecure sometimes for different reasons. However, these days youth and children have unheard of opportunities and choices for self-betterment unlike in the past. Connections with the whole

global community have grown and spread in all directions. Speed, contacts and easy availability of information have turned the world into an interactive society of competitors. It has really become a self-help people's market offering many constructive choices, if only you are keen and determined to become forward-looking and successful. Think about that!

**Fellow Namibians,
Friends and Partners,
Girls and Boys,**

This is the Second Session of the Children's Parliament, under the direction of our National Assembly. For me, what we are here for is a personal commitment and a continuing devotion to this worthy project. I pray that in the future, not too long down the road, our Parliament, as a whole, will find a lasting arrangement for children's Parliament. For those of you who maybe wondering, it is not without intention that we have retained last year's theme for this Second Session. The reason is as follows:

Briefly put, it is meant to allow the activities themselves to shoot deeper roots in our hearts and minds. The theme reads: Parliament: *The People's House and Guardian of Children's Rights and Future*. Linking this theme to one we had for this year's ceremonial opening of Parliament, by President Pohamba, you will appreciate our intention.

That theme said: *The Citizens' Rights and Responsibilities in a Living Parliament*. The People's House which promotes our young people's rights and future prospects can only but remain a living cause. There is thus a close relationship between the two ideals in terms of lawmaking of Parliament and policymaking of Cabinet. They share interdependent mandates and responsibilities.

Elected leaders of the people, private sector and other social partners, as well as representatives of civil society should be promoting a common cause in this effort. This means collaborating on resource mobilisation for social development and for building together. We want a brighter future for Namibia's youth and children. These

shared ideals must not leave behind our people with disabilities, urban slums and rural communities. We are each other's keepers.

Poverty, hunger, disease and underdevelopment remain our nation's most stubborn enemies. They obstruct change, development and social progress. Namibia has adopted Vision 2030 and various supportive developmental strategies to overcome backwardness and skills deficit which are regrettably still extensive. I believe, you have been given copies of speeches delivered at last year's opening ceremony. Read and use them in your deliberations and at friendly palaver.

Girls and Boys,

On this occasion, I have chosen to highlight the eight (8) MDGs adopted by the United Nations in 2000 to reduce world's poverty and hasten development. These Goals aim to improve conditions of trade, investment and economic cooperation between rich and poor nations of the world. The bottomline is to end wars, poverty and to create prosperity for all. That

was about eight years ago, counting from 2000. It is thus expected that come 2015, the eight MDGs, critical as they are, would be met by the world community, not only by public and private sectors but also by others of means and influence.

Our Parliament will continue to serve as the watchful national institution on these strategic challenges. One of the Parliament's primary duties, among many other callings, is to promote constant dialogue among relevant constituents and encourage parliamentarians to earn the people's trust through hard work and selfless dedication to public service. Parliamentary Standing Committees are key vehicles to keep open and buzzing a vital link between MPs and the broad field of local communities.

On the other hand, the voters themselves also have their own inescapable responsibility which derives from the constitution. This responsibility tells them not to leave politics and promotion of ideas to parliamentarians and political parties. It is their duty to remain vigilant as voters and for the nation's well-being. Democracy is first and

foremost kept alive by concerned citizens. This is so for all purposes whether it is the economy, HIV/AIDS, elections, women's rights, corruption or employment creation. The people make the difference when they are united. But they need civic education and encouragement to become pro-active.

Now let me deal specifically with the UN Millennium Development Goals or MDGs. They are eight (8) in number as I indicated:

- 1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger**
- 2. Achieve universal primary education**
- 3. Promote gender equality and empower women**
- 4. Reduce child mortality**
- 5. Improve maternal health**
- 6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases**
- 7. Ensure environmental sustainability**
- 8. Develop a global partnership development**

These poverty reduction, developmental targets and time-bound policy commitments were endorsed by the largest gathering of world

leaders at the United Nations Headquarters in New York in 2000. It was the team I led, as President of the 54th Session of the UN General Assembly at that time, which drafted and advanced the MDGs. I have, therefore, a personal stake in their full and timely realization. Eight years later, questions are now being asked. The questions by the public are about the status of the implementation process and the level of resource mobilization which is vital for the realization of the final target date of 2015. The people want to know, you too, no doubt. I am concerned, no less.

I have asked my Office to have a competent person from our Government's National Planning Commission staff to come and tell us how far down the road our country has gone towards reaching that date. So, until then let me for now leave this issue at that. Except to end my reflection with the engaging words of the UN Secretary General:

“We will have time to reach the Millennium Development Goals – worldwide and in most, or even all,

individual countries – but only if we break with business as usual.

We cannot win overnight. Success will require sustained action across the entire decade between now and the deadline. It takes time to train the teachers, nurses and engineers; to build the roads, schools and hospitals; to grow the small and large businesses able to create the jobs and income needed. So we must start now. And we must more than double global development assistance over the next few years. Nothing less will help to achieve the Goals.”

I would like to reiterate, on this occasion, a bit more from what I said to your predecessors of the First Children’s Parliament on 14 May 2007. I said that I love children in particular and young people generally: “I find young people’s inquiring minds and zeal for seeking out new discoveries encouraging. I find young people’s inquiring minds and zeal for seeking out new discoveries encouraging. This in many ways affirms optimism about learning, because

learning is knowing that change opens doors to the future.

And hardwork has its rewards. Optimism is the key to willingness for trying new things, not being afraid to try again until success comes. Scientists, engineers and architects do their stuff that way and manage in breaking down the walls of ignorance, self-doubt and fear. We learn interesting things through constant exposure to new and diverse experiences. That further encourages us as curious humans to rethink our earlier assumptions about our familiar environment and check our old habits.

In this way, some of you will, no doubt, realize, I trust you will, your own talents and become self-liberators and leaders of the people in various ways. Each generation has human interest challenges of its own. There are leaders among you. We want you to rise and reach your destiny. You must be in search of your own identity as a generation. That means finding your own crossroads for yourselves in the struggle for cultural and economic emancipation that you

make your own worthy cause. Your time has come, go for it!

I think of freedom fighters, public officials, entrepreneurs, intellectuals, writers, reporters and others who are using their talents to help the larger society to satisfy human needs and overcome distress. I am saying these things to you because I care. I want you to become involved in all human pursuits for democracy, peaceful co-existence, universal justice, equality and fairness from one to the other. Children's Parliament is an integral part of our longterm programme of collaboration with our young people from all the 13 Regions of Namibia.

Concentrating on 11th and 12th grades is intentional, because you stand at a point of transition. We are in a way rearranging interaction with you in the interest of both sides. We want us to be talking and listening to each other with future in mind. Many of you here and others outside of your generation will vote for the first time next year (2009) in Presidential and National Assembly elections. *Wow!* You are known as the *born-frees* of Namibia. You have

already or will soon enter the next category, that from childhood to adulthood. We welcome you on board. You will be expected to share in the society's many concerns and hopes for fulfillment.

As parliamentarians, we are keenly aware of our lawmaking and oversight obligations toward the larger society. It is in Parliament and nowhere else where we can do justice to ideas and anxieties of our youth and children, helping them to make their dreams come true. We want to put at your disposal our experiences. But at the same time, we are giving you a platform to playing out and managing your own ambitions. What we may not have here in our Parliament to make available to you, we will request our good friends and people of goodwill across the world for back-up assistance and advice. With that on our minds, we are looking around for best practices and notable success stories for guidance to help you succeed in your own runs.

As I said last year, we want to help you walk tall, filled with knowledge, useful lessons and with confidence to move mountains as leaders, public

servants and managers. We want you proudly to change your own lives for the better and beautify as well the face of Mother Africa to smile and shine forever.

Young women and girls should never have to wait at the back of the queue to allow young men and boys to go ahead first. Rather, the females must see to it and demonstrate that they are up to any challenge or any promising opportunity to make their own contributions for change, gender equality and social development wherever they are. To be a fine lady, a beautiful girl or a loving mother doesn't mean taking humiliating abuse from men, never! You are entitled to your rights for being humans and deserving citizens who count on the authority of our constitution for encouragement and protection. I am a parent to both sexes.

You will find in my last year's speech both operational guidelines and a list of items on a roadmap for now and the future. Have a look at them and add your own collective perspectives to them for future reference. Nothing about life is written in stone, each day is a new beginning

with challenges and opportunities for progress and personal victories. You always have choices, make use of them. In promoting national unity and cultural diversity, we will ensure gender, ethnic and racial balance and you must embrace this ideal always.

Lastly,

We are happy to welcome all of you and I now declare the Second Session of the Children's Second Parliament officially open. And with that, you are called upon to hardwork and search for truth, without fear, favour, or prejudice.

Good Luck and Godspeed.