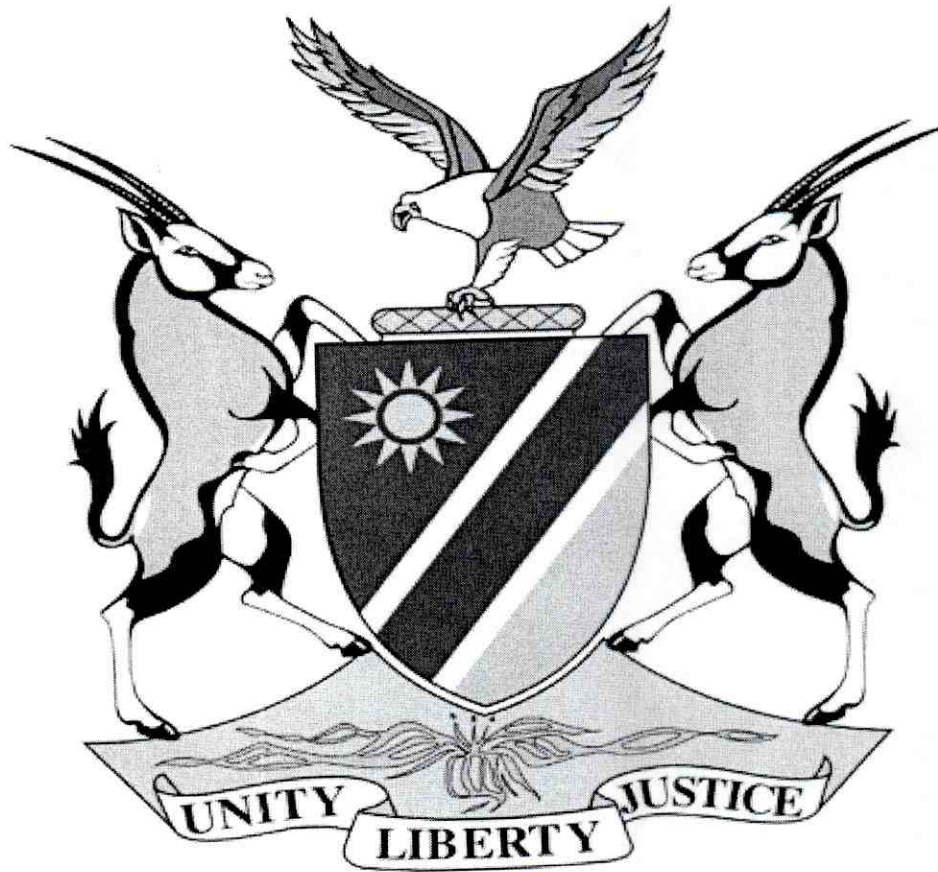


REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY
DR. HIFIKEPUNYE POHAMB
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA
AT THE LAUNCH OF THE 2015
LEGAL YEAR OF THE SUPREME COURT**

06 FEBRUARY 2015

WINDHOEK

**Check Against Delivery.*

Director of Ceremonies,
Right Honourable Prime Minister and President-Elect, Dr Hage Geingob,
Honourable Chief Justice,
Honourable Deputy Chief Justice,
Honourable Attorney-General,
Honourable Judges of the Supreme Court,
Honourable Minister of Justice,
Honourable Ministers,
Honourable Judges of the High Court,
Your Worship, Acting Chief Magistrate,
Distinguished Invited Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I feel honoured to have been invited as Guest of Honour at the launch of the 2015 Legal Year of the Supreme Court. This ceremony is being held against the backdrop of the Third Amendment to the Namibian Constitution, which brought about significant changes to the Judiciary and its governance.

Under the new arrangements, the Chief Justice, as Head of the Judiciary, has been mandated to supervise the entire Judiciary and to monitor the norms and standards of all the courts in the country.

One important aspect of the changes is the administrative and financial autonomy accorded to the Judiciary. Towards this end, the process of making our judiciary self-accounting is underway and all stakeholders are being consulted.

It is my hope that once the process is completed, every effort will be made to properly maintain court infrastructure and to identify the need for additional court buildings in different parts of the country. This will go a long way in ensuring that all our people have reasonable access to justice.

Similarly, we must remain vigilant and do our best to sustain the continued stability of our courts, and the peace and security that we so dearly cherish in our country. I, therefore, urge the Judiciary to continue making efforts to reinforce public confidence and respect for our legal system.

Director of Ceremonies,

The phenomenon of violent crimes represents a deplorable blemish on social fabric. Almost on a daily basis, innocent women and children bear the brunt of senseless violent attacks.

As law-abiding citizens, we are appalled by such barbaric attacks. For their safety, our people look up to our courts and criminal justice system to protect them from the perpetrators of this violence.

Therefore, our criminal justice system, namely the law enforcement agencies and the courts should spare no effort in combating crime and ensuring that justice is done to punish the perpetrators of violence.

With regard to the cases of rape and domestic violence, strict bail conditions must be applied in order to protect complainants from victimisation, threats and further violence by those accused.

Director of Ceremonies,

There is a public outcry about high legal costs in the country. This constitutes a significant barrier for many Namibians to access to justice. I, therefore, welcome the initiatives made by the Judiciary to encourage Alternative Dispute Resolutions in the form of mediation. More should be done to expand mediation as a form of dispute resolution in the country.

Similarly, I urge relevant institutions to fast-track legislation aimed at making the Small Claims Courts operational. This will make it possible for minor civil disputes to be removed from the formal court processes and be dealt with in a more informal, cost effective and speedier fashion.

Access to justice is one of the important cornerstones of our Constitution. It should, therefore, be promoted as one of the fundamental human rights. It should include the provision of information to the general public about the workings of our courts and our justice system. It should also include the speedier resolution of disputes at all levels of our courts.

The reported backlog of cases in our courts is, therefore, a cause of great concern. I am pleased to learn that this matter was one of the issues on the agenda at a recent meeting of senior officials involved in the administration of justice, held at Gross Barmen Resort.

Director of Ceremonies,

My tenure of office as President of our Republic will come to an end in the next few weeks. I will leave office fortified in the knowledge that our country has come a long way and made progress in strengthening our democracy and in creating stable public institutions. One of these institutions is our judiciary.

The New Year that we have just entered will usher in a Government led by a new President, Dr Hage Geingob who was elected as Namibia's next President in November last year. I have no doubt that the new executive, will continue to bolster democracy, the rule of law and good governance as the cornerstones of developing our country.

Once again, I wish to express my gratitude for the invitation to join you here today. I wish our judiciary a productive year ahead.

I thank you.