

**ADDRESS BY HIS LORDSHIP THE CHIEF JUSTICE
PETER S. SHIVUTE AT THE INAUGURATION OF THE
ENVIRONMENTAL CRIMES COURT, OTJIWARONGO
19 AUGUST 2024**

(Salutations)

1. It is with profound honour and privilege that I stand before you today at the Inauguration of Environmental Crimes Court here in Otjiwarongo. This moment marks a significant milestone in our collective journey towards justice, sustainability and the protection of our environment.
2. As we gather in this beautiful region known for its rich biodiversity and stunning landscapes, we are reminded of the delicate balance that exists between human activity and the natural world. Namibia is a land with extra beauty, home to unique ecosystems and wildlife that are not only a source of national

pride but also a vital part of a global heritage. However, this beauty is under threat from environmental crimes that endanger our natural resources, our communities and our future.

3. Today, we are taking a bold step forward in our commitment to combat these crimes. The establishment of the Environmental Crimes Court is a testament to our dedication to upholding the rule of law and ensuring that those who harm our fauna and flora are held accountable. This court will serve as a specialised court of law to address offences such as poaching, illegal logging, offences under the Environmental Management Act 7 of 2007 and other wildlife offences and crimes that are undermining our ecological integrity.
4. The significance of this court extends beyond mere legal proceedings. It embodies our recognition that

environmental protection is not just a legal obligation but a moral imperative. We have a duty to safeguard our natural resources for future generations to ensure that our children and grandchildren inherit a world that is as vibrant and rich as the one we enjoy today.

5. As we embark on this new chapter, I would like to emphasise the importance of collaboration. The challenges we face in protecting our environment are complex and multifaceted. They require a concerted effort from all sectors of society, government agencies, non-governmental organisations, local communities and the private sector. The Environmental Crimes Court will work in tandem with these stakeholders to foster a holistic approach to environmental justice.

6. Moreover, education and awareness are crucial components of our mission. We must strive to educate our citizens about the importance of environmental stewardship and the legal frameworks that protect our natural resources. By empowering individuals with knowledge, we can cultivate a culture of respect for our environment and inspire collective action against those who would exploit it for short-term gain.

7. I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of those who have made this court a reality. From the Office of the Prosecutor General which recognised the need for specialised environmental justice to the partners who committed enormous resources to bring the idea to fruition to the legal professionals who will serve in this court. Your commitment to this court

is commendable. Together we are setting a precedent that will resonate far beyond our borders.

8. As we move forward, let us remember that the fight against environmental crimes is not just about punishment, it is also about restoration and rehabilitation. It must seek to restore damage to ecosystems and support communities that have been affected by the environmental degradation. Justice must be holistic, addressing not only the crime but also its impact on the environment and society.

9. In closing, I urge all judicial officers and the support staff to remain committed to the cause of delivering timely, efficient and effective justice and to execute their tasks with integrity and professionalism. What we do and how well we do it means the difference between a functioning democracy and one where the

public loses respect for the rule of law because of a nonresponsive judicial system. I also wish to take this opportunity to urge all the users of these new facilities to put them to good use and to keep them in a good condition. Each of you should embrace the spirit of this court. Let us work together to create a future where our natural resources are cherished, where the wildlife thrives, and where the air we breathe and the water we drink are protected.

10. The establishment of the Environmental Crimes Court is not the end of our journey; it is just the beginning. Together, we can forge a path towards a sustainable future, ensuring that justice is served for our environment and for all its inhabitants.

Thank you.