

**REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA**



**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY HON. ROYAL KXAO |UIIO|OO, ON THE  
OPENING OF THE INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS &  
INTERNATIONAL DECADE OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES  
STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT (IKS-IDIL) WORKSHOP**

**C'EST SI BON HOTEL, OTJIWARONGO , OTJOZONDJUPA REGION**

**16 JULY 2024**

Director of Ceremonies

Hon. James Unomasa Uerikua – Governor of Otjozondjupa Region

Hon. Marilyn Mbakera – Chairperson of the Otjozondjupa Regional Council & Councillor of Otjiwarongo Constituency

Ms. Eunice Smith – UNESCO Representative to Namibia

Ms. Rebekka Namwandi – Deputy Director for the Division Marginalised Communities

All relevant stakeholders present

All Indigenous Peoples Represented

The Media

## **Ladies and Gentlemen**

This stakeholder engagement reminds me of the humble beginnings of my career as a translator for the Department of Anthropology.

The unique privilege to label and archive indigenous artifacts in one's own language, allowed me to appreciate the rich history of Indigenous Peoples's knowledge in Namibia and SADC.

I want to start off by highlight the case of a young language researcher by the name of Claudia Snyman in South Africa and her grandmother Katrina Esau, to express the importance of language preservation, in the hopes that it also serves as a wakeup call for Namibia.

Mrs. Katrina Esau is the last living N|uu speaker, an ancient San language believed to have been spoken over the span of twenty-five thousand (25 000) years. In her attempt to save a dying language, the grand-daughter was developing phonetic a dictionary in the hopes to preserve the N|uu language for future generations.

This story and many like it, are deeply rooted in the colonial past and the often neglected painful history of the Indigenous San people.

The last permit to hunt a San (Bushman) person was issued in Namibia by the South African government in 1936, about eighty-eight years ago. Meaning the inhumane hunting of an Indigenous person in Namibia was last issued in the lifetime of one individual.

I mention this painful part of the past in my remarks today, as a reminder to the youth and Namibia at large, about one of the darkest reasons why some San languages were neglected by Indigenous speakers and at

the verge of extinction, with some languages potentially already extinct.

The fight for survival was directly linked to your ethnic heritage, and the loss of language was also therefore attached to inherited trauma of being Indigenous. Speaking your own language only about eighty-eight years ago, meant you could be hunted down and killed like an animal.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen**

It is therefore evident that the usage and revitalisation of Indigenous languages is a deliberate attempt of a form of restitution and restoration of human rights and dignity for Indigenous Minorities/Marginalised Communities in Namibia.

The four pillars of the Division are Advocacy, Education Support, Livelihood Support, Land Redistribution and post-resettlement support.

Thus, this engagement is amongst the many advocacy tools for the promotion of human rights for Indigenous Minorities within the strategic objective goals of the Division Marginalised Communities.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen**

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The Intercontinental Conference on Language Policies in Africa of 1997, declared itself amongst others on the following vision for the continent:

1. An Africa that acknowledges its ethno-linguistic pluralism and accepts this as a normal way of life and as a rich resource for development and progress and
2. A democratic Africa where development is not construed in narrow economic goals but instead in terms of a culturally valued way of living together, and within a broader context of justice, fairness and equity for all; *respect for linguistic rights as human rights, including those of minorities.*

Therefore, the fight for Indigenous knowledge systems, cultural sanctity and the preservation of indigenous languages is a human right of every Indigenous person in Namibia.

## **Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen**

Allow me therefore to express my profound gratitude for the privilege of continuing such an exercise from translating for the anthropology department to the

hosting of a multi-stakeholder dialogue on the realisation towards the goals of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages.

The period of 2022-2032 was declared as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages by the United Nations General Assembly.

These ten years are specially carved out to draw attention to and address, per the resolution – *‘The critical loss of Indigenous languages and the urgent need to preserve, revitalise and promote Indigenous languages and to take urgent steps at the national and international levels.’*

## **Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen**

Namibia in its strategic document *Vision 2030*, calls for a collective multilateral and stakeholder approach in resolving and not just addressing very important national problems. This week will therefore serve as a contribution towards Namibia’s strategic vision of working together for national solutions, and also towards the vision of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages, *living no one behind, no one outside.*

## **Ladies and Gentlemen**

The Barcelona Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights of 1996 declares the following as inalienable personal rights:

- The right to be recognised as a member of the language community.
- The right to use one's own language both in private and in public.
- The right to use one's own name.
- The right to interrelate and associate with other members of one's language community of origin.
- The right to maintain and develop one's own culture.
- The right to access cultural services.
- The right to the equitable presence of their language and culture in the communications media.
- The right to receive attention in their language from government bodies and in socio-economic relations.

Therefore, as a country, and as the Division Marginalised Communities, directly responsible for Indigenous Minorities, we are entrusted to ensure the full realization and enjoyment of the above rights for the Indigenous Minorities/Marginalised Communities, and in so doing, it is important that foundational barriers such as language development for educational use are overcome in Namibia.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen**

**There is an increasing cry, from especially San communities in Namibia to instruct their children in their mother tongues in ECD's and primary education, to ensure the proper and harmonious transition into the broader education curriculum.**

**This cry will remain unheard and ill-addressed if these languages are not given a fair chance at development, revitalisation, preservation and formal use in the mainstream education.**

My office stands on the mantra of **C.P.R.** Consultation, Participation, and Representation. A model in support of indigenous inclusivity in policy and processes of development aimed towards the people of Namibia. I believe developmental systems can only be effective through the inclusion of and the contributions of the targeted Indigenous groups.

This platform therefore provides for the unique opportunity to see first hand, the realisation of **CPR** as a concept tool to strengthen the *Why* of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages.

The *Why/reason* of the International decade is to provide an opportunity for partners to collaborate, allocate



necessary resources, host multistakeholder and multilateral dialogues with the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples to strengthen national policies and regulation frameworks.

## **Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen**

In conclusion, the attainment of the collective vision for the International Decade of Indigenous languages calls for more than just sound policies and effective legislative governance on language and Indigenous knowledge systems. It also calls for the advocacy of skills and resource allocation towards the vision.

As is alluded in our Vision 2030, education should be aligned with the national priorities and goals (both public education through advocacy and formal education). Therefore, may all the efforts in these deliberations lead to the realisation of our national priorities of human rights through language development and preservation for Indigenous Minorities/Marginalised Communities of Namibia.

I trust that this multi-partner discourse will empower autonomy of justice for Indigenous Minorities/Marginalised Communities to advocate for deliberate efforts for the inclusion of their linguistic

needs during this pivotal decade, and for the realisation of their aspirations of the global call towards the preservation, revitalization and promotion of Indigenous languages.

With these few remarks, I hereby wish you productive deliberations. I trust that the needs and voices of the people will be heard and implemented into the processes of our collective vision.

Lastly, may we remember that the strengthening of Indigenous People's voices through their languages and Indigenous knowledge systems, **is a direct contribution to the strengthening of our growing democracies and economies.**

I thank you.