



Republic of Namibia

Keynote Address

By

**The Hon Minister of Health and Social Services,
Dr Richard Nchabi Kamwi**

**On the Occasion of the Official Opening of the Caprivi
Regional Culture Festival**

Katima Mulilo, 16 August 2008

Directors of Ceremonies:

Ms. Esnard Musweu and Mr. Godfrey Mayumbelo

His Worship the Mayor of Katima Mulilo – Councillor John Likando

Hon. Governor of the Caprivi Region – Hon. Leonard Mwilima

The Regional Director of Education – Mr. Lovemore Lupalezwi

The Regional Senior Culture Officer – Mr Joel Mutonga

The Chief Judge – Mr Clement Mwilima & his colleagues

Mr. Steven Mudeni – Scripture Reader

The Staff and Learners of competing schools

The Cultural Groups

Members of print & electronic media

Ladies & Gentlemen

I wish to thank the Hon Minister for Youth, National Service, Sports and Culture, Rev. Willem Konjore through Mr. Joel Mutonga, the Regional Culture Officer for a kind invitation for me to address you today on a special and sensitive topic of culture.

I must however advance my apology to you that in as much as I am a cultured citizen of this country in general and this region in particular, my approach to this topic may be too philosophical than many of you had anticipated.

I was born here in this region, grew up here and went to school here but as a result of my involvement in the liberation struggle of this country I have an advanced interaction with many social groupings both locally and abroad.

My having travelled extensively across the length and breadth of the globe and having worked outside this region for many years are all factors that have shaped my new perceptions and views about culture.

I must admit that in as much as I still have my regional identity, I now have a broader understanding and meaning of the concept of culture from a global picture.

I must therefore confess to you that I have more of a global cultural identity than merely that perception of culture that confines me to being a son and child of the Caprivi region.

It is for this reason that I begin my statement from the premise of the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, which was adopted by the 33rd General Conference of UNESCO in October 2005.

Cultural expressions promote dialogue, strengthen the link that unite our diverse communities and contribute to Namibia's economic vitality.

Allow me therefore, without being too particular to any regional ethnic culture to make an exposé of what culture is. Culture is a body of learned behaviour common to a human society.

It is also referred to as a system of shared beliefs, values, customs behaviour, and artefacts that the members of any given society use to cope with their environment and are transmitted from generation to generation through learning (Bates and Plog, Webpage). Culture acts like a template that shapes behaviour and consciousness within a human society.

The key proponents of culture are language, music, food, clothes, classes and castes, gender roles, marriages and kinship, etiquette (greetings and handshakes), religion, socialization and infant care, medicine and health care, performing and visual art.

I argue that it is not good to simply limit our understanding of culture to matters of race, tribe and the institutionalised values and norms of a specific society but it must be a concept that should be broadened to encompass the spirit of humanism “ubuntu” and the greater struggle for the elimination of colonialism and slavery and bring about unity among our people.

Programme Director

Our beginning as a country was not easy. We were divided by the defunct South African regime. We were taught to believe that we were different, so different that we had nothing similar to embrace together and that even our thinking was different.

Their aggressive beginning was to decolonise our minds to see one another as tribal groups that had no common values. In as much as they admired our customs and traditions they despised our commonality and attempted to make us see our values and norms as practices of backwardness and being uncivilised.

This phenomenon was not easy in making us shed the dehumanization that was meted against our culture and our people. I urge you today to be proud as citizens in a free and democratic country. You must be proud to be under the leadership of a government that recognises cultural pluralism.

For many decades in Namibia discrimination based on race, religion, creed or culture was rampant. Soon after independence, through the SWAPO party, a Cultural Policy was given an important role to play.

The SWAPO government felt and still feels that culture lies at the heart of the creation, development and democratization of a nation. Hence the recognition of traditional leaders as custodians of various cultures that forms the foundation of our existence as a rainbow nation that is imbedded in our principle of unity in diversity.

It is our humble and considered belief as a government that our country's culture enables our citizens to define themselves, know who they are, share the values rooted in our common history and shape our future as a united people.

This principle became part of the Namibian Cultural Policy that was drawn in 2001. As a people centered government we strongly uphold to our constitutional provision under Article 19 that everybody is entitled to their own culture as long as it does not impinge on the rights of other cultures.

The aim is to encourage mutual understanding, respect and tolerance for national unity. We have managed, over the past 18 years of our freedom and independence, to celebrate our cultural differences and embraced one another as a united nation.

Namibian history, arts and culture now forms part of our school curriculum. The idea is to teach our children know about their culture but also to know the true history of their country.

The National Monuments Council was set up to supervise the preservation of Namibia's historical monuments.

The National Heritage Council is in existence to recover all our lost cultural history and to combat the illegal trade in our works of art.

We have, as a people centred government, made special budgetary provision to build an Independence Memorial Museum for the preservation and documentation of our true history of liberation.

We have built our own State House; we have built the Heroes Acre. This effort is geared at the preservation of our Namibian cultural legacy, the rich heritage of our people and a unique Namibian identity.

The Namibian Film Commission encourages local film production and promotes the country as a film location.

The interface of Cultural villages and Cultural Centres with the Ministry of Environment and Tourism in all regions of this country serves as a catalyst for tourist attraction that generates massive income for our people and injects direct foreign currency into the economy of our country.

The Namibian Book Development Council was set as an umbrella body of writers, publishers and printers to encourage Namibians to expose their cultural identity through writing.

There are music organizations in this country that protects the intellectual property of arts by preventing piracy and other forms of illegal trading in music such as the Namibian Society of Composers and Authors of Music (NASCAM).

We have witnessed the Annual national Cultural Festivals that is hosted by the Ministry of Youth National Services Sports and Culture every year.

We have seen the involvement of the private sector in supporting local music industry such as the Sanlam- NBC Music awards.

I point to you that this is where we are in terms of cultural renaissance as a country. We are not an island but have become part of the African Community of Nations under the umbrella of the African Union.

We have embraced the culture of singing the AU anthem together with our National Anthem as symbols of our unity and nationhood.

Director of Ceremonies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I urge you to respect these symbols and live by accepting that our culture is dynamic. We must keep what is good and indeed discard what we feel does not form part of our new thinking in a globalised society.

I further urge you to respect your political and traditional leaders as it is also important to respect your parents. Our culture is rooted in the love and respect for elders. I am addressing the youth participating here and elsewhere.

Acept to be part of your extended families. This is and has often been the foundation for our existence in this region. It is a culture that will allow us the comfort to take care of orphaned children in our homes and villages.

Uphold to the values and customs of blessed marriages. Seek the consent of your parents before you marry or get married. Avoid premarital sex because it is not part of tradition and culture.

Do away with the disease of internal xenophobia and tribalism. It is a disease that has destroyed many nation States in Africa.

What I have pointed out simply goes to show that as a government we have made conditions that are conducive for all forms of self actualization for our people.

You must have realised that the youth of many regions in this country have become active in the production of local music such as Gaza, The Dogg, Stanely and many others who have become popular artists in the music industry. We have also the known of new innovations of the Oviritje music.

These are all forms of cultural expressions that are encouraged by the existing empowerment of our people in this country.

It is sad for me to note that the youth in the Caprivi have not become part of this cultural empowerment.

I ask you to set clubs and begin to organise yourselves to establish choirs, drama groups and join the rest of your fellow citizens in advancing your culture and the development of your region.

Stand up and begin to identify your potential and start working hard to fulfil your dreams. Develop sporting clubs and use the competitive advantage of being closer to Zambia and Botswana to seek advice and partnership with your brothers and sisters in these neighbouring countries to create platforms for cultural exchanges.

Directors of Ceremonies, Ladies and gentlemen

I now have the honour to declare the Caprivi Regional Culture Festival 2008 officially opened.

I thank you.