

**DRAFT SPEECH FOR Mr. Richard Kamwi, MINISTER OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL
WELFARE SERVICES
COMMEMORATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR OLDER PERSONS
WINDHOEK, 1 OCTOBER 2008**

THEME: "RIGHTS OF OLDER PERSONS"

PROTOCOL OBSERVED

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the invitation to address you at this very special event, to commemorate the International Day of Older Persons with the rest of the world. What a wonderful occasion to demonstrate that the well-being and expertise of older persons in Namibia is important to us. Older persons symbolize not only our ties with the past, but they are also the bridge to the future.

I want to congratulate the Ministry of Health and Social Services, City of Windhoek, UN, WHO, Council for Older Persons in Namibia and other stakeholders with the initiative taken to organize this event. Your interest in the well-being of our older people and your efforts to protect their dignity and rights are highly appreciated.

One thing is for sure older persons are an integral part of society and that we need their expertise and wisdom. It is also equally important that we commit ourselves to the protection of their rights and dignity, especially those who are in need of care.

Director of Ceremonies I would like to focus on two issues which I regard as critical in the current debate regarding a new dispensation for older persons, namely the protection of their rights and the creation of a climate that will allow them to contribute to the establishment and maintenance of Namibia. The two issues

referred to are closely related. As a matter of fact it is two sides of the same coin, namely respect. Respect not only entails a commitment to protect the vulnerable but also implies that older persons should be given an opportunity to play a meaningful role in community life. A society which ignores and neglects its older people, denies its own history and its own origins and becomes shallow, self-centred and rootless.

The Namibian Government is in agreement that the well-being of older persons in need of care should be protected effectively. Family members and the community should be empowered to play an important role in the protection of older persons. Support systems for family care givers, as well as appropriate training should be a priority. Older persons should also be educated regarding their rights and empowered to report cases of abuse.

Exploitation and abuse of older persons can not be tolerated in a civilized country. Older persons should be treated with respect and dignity and that the abuse is not acceptable.

The personal safety of our older persons is a matter of great concern. I sincerely hope that the intervention of the Namibia / City Police strategies will result in a reduction of crime against older persons. However, it is each member of the community's responsibility to assist the Law Enforcement Unit to combat crime against older persons.

The Government also recognizes the value of older persons' quality of life. The Department of Welfare shall therefore not abdicate its primary responsibility towards senior citizens.

Two of the most important characteristics of our new society are the active involvement of the people in the governance of the country and especially their community as well as the increasing importance of Non-Governmental Organizations and welfare organizations. Welfare organizations are going to be of even more

significance than in the past. It is a mechanism by which the Government on all levels is supported in rendering of services and through which people will be able to take co-responsibility for the well-being of their community.

The principles of partnership, especially in the welfare field can only be realized through strong and dynamic community based organizations. Welfare organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations are to be the conscience of the Namibian society and should play an important role in building and the utilization of human capacity. The human capacity of the Namibian society can only be fully utilized if the potential and expertise of older persons are taken into consideration in all future human resource development strategies. Welfare organizations are powerful mechanisms to promote the utilization of a pool of under-utilized potential and to establish a powerful culture of voluntarism.

My message to all our senior citizens is that we care and love you all. Thank you for your contribution towards building this country, educating the younger generations and sharing your skills and expertise with us.

I thank you all very much for your kind indulgence.