



Republic of Namibia

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

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ON THE OCCASION OF

**THE WORKSHOP ON THE DRAFT DEMAND
REDUCTION POLICY ON ALCOHOL USE AND MISUSE**

**WINDHOEK
19 FEBRUARY 2008**

Director of Ceremonies, Dr. Forster
WHO Representative, Dr. Roballo
Deputy Country Representative UNICEF, Ms. Ashok
Director: Developmental Social Welfare Services, Ms. Katjuongua
Policy Advisor, Australian Government, Dr. Evans
Programme Manager, Substance Abuse, Ms. Adams
Senior Officials MOHSS
Senior Officials from line Ministries
Managing Director Namibia Breweries Limited, Mr. Duffy
Senior Managers, of Self-Regulating Alcohol-Industry Forum
Managers from the Treatment Providers Forum
Chief of the City Police, Mr. Kanime
Members of the Media
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am grateful to join you at this important gathering where the Ministry together with the Self-Regulating Alcohol-Industry Forum (SAIF) will be consulting on the moderation of alcohol consumption. According to the Scripture, and I want to be precise, in Proverbs 23:21, I quote *“for the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty: and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags.”* Similarly, in Ecclesiastics 10:17 *“...eat for strength and not for drunkenness”*. Though there has been no stated theme for this draft policy, after personal reflection on the purpose of the policy, I would assert that a fitting theme is “Responsible alcohol consumption”; and I propose this theme to you.

When the Lord created the earth, He created it with plenty for the benefit of His children to be used in moderation. Unfortunately, over time some men have become greedy and consume most things in excess. In reality anything taken in excess can have negative results. Given this background I wish to commend the organisers of this very important workshop because I believe together as health practitioners and the alcohol industry, our intended

objective should be the promotion of good health and a sound well-being for all.

Director of Ceremonies,

The effects of the abuse of alcohol misuse, its overindulgence and irresponsible use, is harmful to our children and the future of our societies. Therefore, we remain grateful that the alcohol/beverage industry has come to realise the adverse effects of the inappropriate and unsafe use of the commodity they produce and sell. I commend the industry for the initiative made to self-regulate, in particular the policy of reduction in demand is respectable. It is clear that alcohol consumption is taken by all, across the board. Indeed, alcoholism, which leads to woes and tribulations, affects people across generations, educated or not, whether they are employed or not, whether they live in the city or in rural areas, and right through economic and political classes.

It is my hope, therefore, that this policy will regulate alcohol consumption to the point of moderation, such that those in our midst will use their capacities to the fullest, not hindered by the adverse results of alcohol, and contribute to nation building.

Director of Ceremonies

According to the literature review, the results from a couple of continents including Australia, Europe and our own Africa, clearly indicate that excess of alcohol consumption is detrimental to one's personal health and translates into harmful consequences for the community. Alcohol abuse, spurred by cheap and easy availability of liquor, is directly correlated to crime property damage, public disorder and assault. Indeed harmful alcohol consumption is a major cause of a high proportion of illness and premature deaths.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Let us now turn specifically to Namibia identifying with the implications and motivations of the recommended policy initiative. In Namibia, 56% of the population consume more than 10 units of alcohol per drinking occasion. This consumption level reflects surpasses definitions of alcohol dependency (6 units of alcohol per drinking session). Clearly, this is worrisome.

Similarly, the Gender-Specific Drinking Habits fact sheet in Namibia based on the Nationwide KAP Baseline Survey of 2002 indicates that those in Namibia who drink, drink to get drunk; and furthermore the fact sheet reflects sadly, that there is very little evidence of responsible drinking among Namibians. We need to acknowledge that the majority of those who drink in Namibia are heavy drinkers and that inappropriate alcohol consumption and its effects are some the most important and challenging public health issues we face.

Alcohol abuse contributes to a wide range of social and health problems, including depression, injuries, cancer, cirrhosis, dependence, family disruption and loss of work productivity. It often leads to fights, domestic violence and even murder.

We must therefore seek redress to this situation as a matter of urgency. It is the Ministry's belief that the draft Policy referred to earlier will provide a good framework for reversing these negative trends of alcohol abuse in Namibia. As I mentioned earlier, world-wide surveys show that the lower the average alcohol consumption of a country, the less personal and societal harm there is from alcohol abuse. In this regard, I am pleased to note that the Coalition on Responsible Drinking is working against all odds to lower the alcohol consumption levels of Namibians. I encourage you to remain steadfast and motivated in this worthy undertaking.

Director of Ceremonies

Of course we must recognize the economic benefits the alcohol industry generates in the country. Indeed, the industry suggests a provision of about 35,000 formal and informal jobs, contributing a total of about N\$ 1, 2 billion of the total national income from the alcohol manufacturing sector. Alcoholic beverages exports went up by 40% by volume, thereby bringing in important foreign capital. In addition, the alcohol industry is supporting the agricultural sector through the use of crops such as sorghum.

Nonetheless, we must focus on the responsible use of the products from this industry. In this regard, I am encouraged by the implementation of the social responsibility initiative by members on behalf of the industry through the “Too young is too Young” campaign, the “Broken Window” campaign involving law enforcement, and the vital support given to NGOs such as the Drug Awareness Group and the Coalition on Responsible Drinking.

Director of Ceremonies

In order to address these challenges evidence-based policy-making is increasingly informing policy world-wide. The WHO and the World Bank agree that the most effective approach to reduce alcohol abuse and related negative effects requires a comprehensive set of measures to be introduced to reduce the harmful use of alcohol.

In line with this, the Ministry of Health and Social Services has put together a Draft Demand Reduction Policy on Alcohol Use and Misuse to guide the national agenda for responsible drinking, thereby curtailing the effects of alcohol abuse. The National Draft Demand Reduction Policy will also serve as the guiding document for legislative reforms and will inform appropriate national responses to this growing challenge.

The overall aim is to recognize that alcohol misuse is a major public health problem with devastating socio-economic consequences. Reducing alcohol abuse and thereby eliminating its devastating impacts is a shared responsibility. All stakeholders both in the private and public sectors, including civil society, must rally together in order to harness their collective efforts.

Director of Ceremonies, Ladies and Gentlemen

I want to close with a specially directed message to parents. Indeed, parents carry the primary responsibility to ensure that their children are well informed about the devastating long term consequences of alcohol abuse. Parents have to set the example in this regard by not abusing alcohol; but being responsible and moderate consumers of alcohol. By now we understand fully the harmful, retrogressive and often shameful consequences of alcohol abuse. Therefore, let our example be one that elevates human dignity and indeed, inspires our children to rise to great heights.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

I wish you fruitful deliberations. I now have the honour to declare this Workshop on the Draft Demand Reduction Policy on Alcohol Use and Misuse officially open.

I thank you for your kind attention.