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SPEECH OF THE HON FRANS KAPOFI, MINISTER OF DEFENCE AND VETERANS AFFAIRS, ON THE OCCASION OF THE 34TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE NAMIBIAN DEFENCE FORCE HELD AT DIMO HAMAAMBO GARRISON, GROOTFONTEIN ON FRIDAY, 21 JUNE 2024

I am honoured to officiate at the 34th anniversary of the Namibian Defence Force (NDF). I have brought you salutations from His Excellency Dr Nangolo Mbumba, our State President and the Commander-In-Chief of the Namibian Defence Force. He wishes you well on your day.

Thirty-four years ago, after Namibia held its first democratic elections in November 1989, the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO), which won the elections overwhelmingly, had to spearhead the preparations for the ceremony to celebrate freedom and independence which were to be declared in the midnight of 21 March 1990. The success of that day is attributed to the leadership of SWAPO under the tutelage of His Excellency Comrade Dr Sam Shafiishuna Nujoma, Founding President and Father of the Namibian Nation, the Commanders of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) and the Kenyan Contingent which assisted with the training of the troops who were on parade on that day.

After Namibia attained her independence, it became increasingly urgent and necessary to establish a military organisation that would guarantee freedom and independence and safeguard the gains of independence. The former leaders of PLAN under the leadership of the late Lt Gen Jerobeam Dimo Hamaambo had to urgently mobilise both the former combatants of PLAN and the demobilised members of the South West Africa Territorial Force (SWATF) to form a united Defence Force. The British government was then requested to send a British Military Assistance Training Team (BMATT) and the civilian component to assist with the establishment of the Ministry of Defence as well as to develop a standardised training

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curriculum and military doctrine. As a result, and in line with the provision of the Constitution of Namibia in Chapter 15, Article 115 as amended, the Namibian Defence Force (NDF) was established on 02 June 1990.

Today, we are gathered here at the Lt Gen Dimo Hamaambo Garrison, to belatedly commemorate the founding of the NDF and to celebrate its remarkable journey of 34 years. I am humbled that this garrison is named after the late Lt General Jerobeam Dimo Hamaambo, the first Chief of the Defence Force, who selflessly led PLAN from 1967 until its disbandment in 1989 and successfully led the NDF for ten years from 1990 until his retirement in the year 2000. Gen Dimo Hamaambo is thus a symbol of our collective achievements on the military front before and after independence. At this juncture, I would like us to observe a moment of silence in honour of our departed Commander in Chief, His Excellency Dr Hage G. Geingob, the late Lt Gen Dimo Hamaambo as well as for all the men and women in uniform who have sacrificed their lives in service to the nation or left us after they have remarkably contributed to the successes of the NDF.

Parade!!! Attention....

Thank you.

Distinguished Guests, Officers, Soldiers, Airmen and Sailors,

It is crucial to reflect on the fact that our nation-state was constructed on the principle of national reconciliation, and the Namibian Defence Force was the first institution to embody this concept by bringing together erstwhile enemies to form one solid unit united by one purpose amidst many contradictions. The pioneers of the NDF bore and lived the brunt of the unity of opposites as espoused by Frederick Engel's Law of the Unity and Conflict of the Opposites. The successful merger of these two antagonistic groups proved that the policy of reconciliation which the SWAPO government implemented at independence was validated by the

NDF. Hence, the NDF, in its formative years, played a significant role in fostering unity and peace within our nation and is a source of immense pride and a strong sense of belonging for all of us.

The mission of the NDF, as enshrined in our constitution in Chapter 15, Article 115 as amended, is 'to defend the territory of Namibia and national interests'. The MODVA and the NDF have executed this mandate diligently and with distinction over the past 34 years. Namibia's sovereignty has been challenged on many occasions since 1990. However, the gallant men and women from the NDF have prevailed, thereby ensuring our nation's security and stability. This successful defence of our territorial integrity should instil in all of us a sense of pride and confidence in the NDF's capabilities.

As a child of international solidarity, Namibia has always felt indebted to the international communities who stood by the Namibian people's side during the dark days of colonial oppression and the resultant war of liberation. As a result, the Namibian government decided in 1993, barely three years after independence, to contribute a military contingent to the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). Subsequently, in 1995, a military contingent was deployed to the United Nations Verification Mission in Angola (UNAVEM). This was further followed by the deployment of another contingent to the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) in 2004. Over the years, officers from the NDF were also deployed to Peace Support Operations (PSOs) sponsored either by the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU) or the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) to countries such as Angola, Burundi, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, Kosovo, Lesotho, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan. At the moment, Namibia is the country that on average has more female officers deployed on UN PSO.

The core business of any defence force is to fight and win wars. The NDF has made the nation proud with its robustness and determination in the face of danger. Its exploits during the Peace Enforcement Operations in

the Democratic Republic of Congo from 1998 to 2002 are revered by both friends and foes. Recently, we received back our contingent which participated in the SADC Mission in Mozambique where our officers contributed immensely in the planning of the operations and support of the fighting troops. These and many more have ranked Namibia amongst warrior nations.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Today we are therefore reminiscing the accounts of and commemorating a Force that has graduated from being an experimental of National Reconciliation to a fully developed force with three components covering all the dimensions of our territory (those being the land mass, the air and the maritime spaces). We are therefore proud of its achievements as one of the youngest forces in the world. We are also heartened by the prospects of its growth and further development to be able to withstand the challenges of the future. We can, however, not afford to be content with our achievements and be complacent; we need to continue working hard to prepare for any eventualities in the future,

Secessions are still being muted here and there on the African continent and elsewhere. Intra and inter-state conflicts are still prevalent in the world. Terrorism and violent extremism which were alien to the African continent are ravaging communities in North, West, East and Central Africa and are showing their ugly heads in Southern Africa. All these are reasons enough for Namibia to equip herself militarily in deterrence and to be able to fight and win on the home soil or elsewhere where we would be required to put the boots on the ground. We need to be ready to defend our country and its interests at all times.

The parting message of our late Commander-In-Chief, when he addressed us here on 12 December 2023 where he outlined how the NDF can continue to develop going forward must be fulfilled. He emphasised Force Modernisation, Recruitment, Force Mobility, Training, Welfare,

Discipline and Defence Diplomacy as crucial for the development of the NDF. As I have indicated numerous times, we need to use our financial and other resources sparingly and strategically so that we can acquire capabilities that will capacitate us to defend our territory in times of need. We must do this conscious of the fact that the world is moving very fast in terms of technological advancement, and we cannot afford to be left too far behind. We must embrace technology, move away from the orthodox way of doing things and re-engineer our organisation and structures. The government is committed to mobilising the necessary resources for the development of the Force.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Having said that, I wish to applaud the Executive Director of the Ministry, Dr Wilhelmine Shivute, the Chief of Defence Force, Air Marshal Martin Kambulu Pinehas Chief, and all your staff for the effort you are putting into planning and executing the modernising of our defence force. I would like to encourage you to continue to create fora for our military personnel to interact with their counterparts in the SADC Region and beyond because it is only through the exchange of knowledge and experiences that our defence force will be able to grow. Our soldiers, airmen and sailors must be confident that no task is too difficult to achieve. For the first time in the history of the NDF, last year (2023), we had a group of Naval Officers sailing from Walvis Bay to Brazil and back. Such escapades demonstrate the abilities and confidence of our officers and the entire system.

I would also like to congratulate all the former Ministers, Deputy Ministers of Defence, and former Permanent Secretaries for successfully maintaining and employing the NDF over the past thirty-four (34) years, albeit with enormous challenges. The former Chiefs of Defence and the current are also praiseworthy for the balanced structure, readiness and preparedness that have made the NDF a Force to be reckoned with. The rank and file of the NDF have made our nation proud with the many

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victories scored on the battlefield and in enforcing law and order when called upon to do so.

As provided for by Vision 2030, I am hereby reaffirming our government's commitment to developing the NDF on par with the best in the Region. I therefore urge you to continue training hard, informed by contemporary world dynamics. The government and the nation hold you in high regard and would, therefore, continue to expect just the best from you.

Happy 34th Anniversary.

I thank you!

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