BANQUET STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY HIFIKEPUNYE POHAMBA, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA, ON THE OCCASION OF HIS STATE VISIT TO THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

28 NOVEMBER 2005

BERLIN
GERMANY
Your Excellency Prof Dr Horst Köhler,
President of the Federal Republic of Germany,
And Mrs Eva Luise Köhler,
Honourable Ministers,
Honourable Members of Parliament,
Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I wish to express my appreciation and gratitude to you, Mr. President, the Government, and the people of the Federal Republic of Germany, for the warm welcome and hospitality accorded to me and my delegation, since our arrival in this beautiful capital city of Berlin, – a city, which is fast re-emerging as a major cultural centre in Europe and the world. I feel privileged to visit your great country so soon after the inauguration of a new German Government. The people of Namibia and I personally, deeply appreciate this important gesture, which will go a long-way in strengthening the excellent bilateral relations that exist between our two countries.

2. I would like to state that I have enjoyed the discussions and exchange of ideas that we have had since my arrival this morning. I found your keen interest in Namibia, our sub-region SADC, and Africa in general, most profound. I am impressed by your deep insights in the challenges our people are facing and your concern for the welfare and development of Africa. I look forward to the discussions that will follow with the Chancellor, Dr Angela Merkel, and her Ministers. We have followed with keen interest, the remarkable political process, which has led to the formation of the 2nd grand coalition government in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany. It speaks of political maturity and deep democratic values motivated by a common national interest.

Mr President,
3. My Government attaches great importance to the special relationship that exists between Germany and Namibia. My visit is aimed at further consolidating that special relationship that was unanimously decided by the Bundestag in 1989 and confirmed by the Bundestag in 2004. Our presence here is a clear indication of the confidence we have in this partnership. We believe that our special relationship will continue to develop positively for the mutual benefit of our two countries.

4. German cooperation with Namibia has grown stronger and deeper over the years. Many important projects have been completed, while others are currently running with German financial and technical assistance. By focusing development cooperation in the areas of natural resources management, rural development, transport and the promotion of the economy, your Government continues to be instrumental in assisting the people of Namibia to achieve the Millennium Development Goals – our own solemn pledges, which we jointly developed when my predecessor, President Sam Nujoma, presided over the United Nations Millennium Summit of 2000 in New York.

5. I would like to take this opportunity to express our heartfelt gratitude for Germany’s vital financial assistance in various projects including, the construction of the Trans Caprivi Highway, technical support for project planning, research and information technology, land reform and resettlement, Namibia’s National Programme to Combat Desertification, the National Biodiversity Programme, Geological Survey, the promotion of the Small and Medium Enterprise Sector and combating HIV/AIDS, to name just a few. We also appreciate most sincerely, the development assistance from the EU in support of additional infrastructure development, to which Germany is a major contributor.
6. Recently, Germany’s Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development pledged to increase the volume of development funding to Namibia and announced that in terms of financial planning for the next fiscal year, Germany intends to double the amount of financial assistance to Namibia. I wish to express our appreciation for this commitment.

This valuable contribution, will no doubt enhance our efforts towards reducing poverty and uplifting the living standards of our people.

7. I also wish to thank various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and companies, operating in Namibia with the support of the German Government. They are making a valuable contribution to the economic and social development of Namibia, and indeed are strengthening our bilateral ties. I hope that more investors and entrepreneurs will take advantage of Namibia’s conducive political and economic environment and utilise the investment friendly policies and instruments we have put in place since independence. Namibia is a country that abounds with countless investment opportunities and many untapped natural resources.

8. In this connection, I wish to assure private sector operators that my Government has adopted a zero tolerance against corruption and that necessary instruments have been put in place to vigorously root it out.

We are determined to achieve success in this regard, as demonstrated by improvements in Namibia’s current rating in the 2005 Report of Transparency International. The Report shows that our ranking has improved by seven positions to number forty-seven (47) out of one hundred and forty-six (146) countries and number four (4) out of forty-four (44) countries in Africa as least corrupt.

Mr President,
9. I am aware that some events in my country have been receiving wide media coverage here in Germany. This is particularly true for issues related to land reform. In our view, the issue has been completely taken out of context and exaggerated, to say the least. The reality on the ground is nowhere close to the superficial impressions created by the media. Since Namibia's independence, the issue of land reform was regarded as one of the most critical areas on our development agenda. It is a well-known fact that the legacy of colonialism and apartheid has left us with a highly skewed ownership structure of economic resources including productive agricultural land.

10. Every year since Namibia’s independence in 1990, the reports of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) puts Namibia as the country with the most uneven distribution of wealth in the world. These imbalances must be addressed. In 1991, our Government hosted a National Land Conference which adopted a widely shared consensus amongst all actors, that a land reform process must be undertaken speedily. This consensus extends to and involves all political parties, farmers representatives, labour and employer organizations and NGOs, such as churches. For the past 14 years, we have been undertaking the land reform process, primarily on the basis of willing seller willing buyer principle. This practice continues to be our primary implementation tool. Expropriation is a last resort and is only done in the public interest subject to the payment of just compensation in accordance with requirements and procedures determined by Act of Parliament. Indeed, since the process started, no farms have been acquired through this method. I must state here that only five cases are currently pending before our courts.

In this process, we act fully in conformity with the Namibian Constitution and our statutory laws. It is for this reason that our Government budgets N$50 million annually to acquire commercial farm land for resettlement purposes.

11. In the history of nations, the period of fifteen years is considered as a very brief period. However, since our independence in 1990, the people of Namibia have made great strides, not only to undo and reverse the injustices of apartheid colonialism in many ways.
Although we have made some significant progress, some sections of our population remain vulnerable. The majority of our people continue to face the hardships of poverty, worsened by the legacies of colonialism and apartheid. At present, Namibia has a highly skewed level of income distribution which, according to the UNDP, is the worst in the world. Despite these difficult realities, Namibia is not included in the debt cancellation talks involving the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC).

We have appealed for Namibia’s rating as a middle-income country to be reconsidered in view of the incredibly high income disparities prevalent in our society. I am sure that as an economist, you fully understand the situation and we hope that your Government will throw its weight to support us in our endeavour.

Mr President,

12. I fully agree with the sentiments that you expressed in December last year, at the University of Tübingen, when you said and I quote: “Africa, a continent that is often virtually forgotten, must take its rightful place in this one world – as a partner among partners”.

13. I believe that Africa is on the way to take its place among the nations of the world. Our commitment to the common vision of the African Union (AU) to maintain peace, security and democracy on our continent is just one proof. The New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) aims at placing our countries on the path of sustainable growth and development. Our hope is to increase economic productivity and trade and thereby strengthen Africa’s economic performance and competitiveness in the global arena. At the same time, we are seeking to develop effective smart partnerships for economic development with both developing and industrialized nations.

14. Africa also wants to become a partner amongst partners in the multilateral arena within the United Nations System. In this context,
we shall continue to make concerted efforts towards the reform of the United Nations Security Council, in order to achieve equality, mutual respect and to secure a prosperous future for all humankind.

Mr President,

15. You are known as a strong supporter of Africa. Your personal commitment to tackling economic disparities and social injustices has contributed immensely to the noble efforts of bringing relief to those who face poverty. I commend you for your various initiatives that provide support to the development of our continent, and in particular, your recent Partnership with Africa Initiative. I am convinced that your initiatives will enhance the understanding of the international community about the real challenges that face Africa.

16. Once again, allow me to thank you most sincerely for the warm welcome and kind hospitality accorded to me and my delegation since our arrival. I am convinced that our visit will be fruitful and rewarding.

Your Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen,

17. May I now ask all of you to rise and join me in proposing a toast to the continued good health of His Excellency President Köhler, and to the lasting bond of friendship between our two countries and peoples. To the President!

I thank you.