



Remarks by Hon. Prof. Peter H. Katjavivi, MP
SPEAKER: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

General Debate

*Promoting cultural pluralism and peace through inter-faith and
inter-ethnic dialogue*

137th Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Assembly

Tavrisheskiy Palace

**Headquarters of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of member nations of the
Commonwealth of Independent States (IPA CIS)**

St. Petersburg, Russian Federation



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Honourable President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU),

Honourable Valentina Ivanovna Matvienko, Chairperson of the Federation Council,

The Secretary General

Speakers and Presiding Officers of various Parliaments present,

Members of Parliament,

I would like to pay tribute to the IPU and the Russian Parliament for hosting us in this important city of St. Petersburg. It is a city which has a significant history, whose impact was felt beyond the continent of Europe.

Likewise, I also want to pay tribute to this great country of Russia, which was a home to many of our comrades during the struggle for the liberation of our own country and many other African countries. Furthermore, Russia provided logistical support to our freedom endeavours and has continued to be our important partner post-independence by training many of our young people in various technical and medical fields.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The theme before us in this General Debate of the 137th IPU Assembly should be understood in the context of the world we live in today, where there is much intolerance and conflict. This calls for our various national parliaments to play an active role

in ensuring that we respect each other and acknowledge our cultural pluralism.

Chapter 3 of the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia emphasizes fundamental rights and freedoms for all. This was necessitated by our history as a people who suffered the wrath of colonial oppression. Our Constitution was deliberately designed to eliminate discriminatory instruments that were used to suppress us.

In Namibia, we have emerged out of colonial domination and an apartheid system that was built on the division of the people along racial and ethnic lines. Upon the attainment of Independence, we felt it was vital that we put emphasis on fundamental human rights, i.e. the protection of human rights and freedoms, protection of life, protection of liberty, respect for human dignity and forging unity in diversity whilst accepting our diversity as a form of strength.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Promoting a society based on inclusiveness requires constant renewal of values based on co-existence and acceptance of each other.

In Namibia we have twelve distinct communities whose languages are recognized by the Ministry of Education and taught in schools, as well as the official language, English. Many of these communities have recognized leaders constituted within the Council of Traditional Leaders.

The customs and traditional heritage of our various ethnic groups is preserved and valued through the Traditional

Authorities Act. However, traditional customs need to be aligned with our national Constitution, so as to promote an inclusive society.

A ten-year project at the University of Namibia undertook to ascertain customary laws. This project endeavored to ensure that laws relating to all the various traditional authorities in the country are aligned with the Constitution. This was a commendable undertaking, which demonstrates that traditional authorities and Parliament need to work together.

Our quest for self-determination was founded on the urge to ensure justice for all, the dignity and freedom to exist as citizens of an independent nation. Post-independence, we continue to inculcate these ideals into our people by cultivating a democratic culture in our country.

Furthermore, various religious denominations under the leadership of the Council of Churches in Namibia often come together during a certain time of the year, to jointly promote harmony and national reconciliation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In Namibia, we have a pluralistic democracy. The National Assembly MPs are elected through proportional representation, and we currently have nine political parties represented there. Members of the National Council, our second chamber, are elected on a constituency basis, with three MPs from each region of the country. These structures were chosen specifically to ensure fair representation for all, and to ensure that no one is left out of the Namibian house.

It is within our power as parliamentarians, the lawmakers of our countries, to build inclusive institutions and policies, and to ensure that democracy in our respective countries and the global village at large is firmly grounded. This is why we have committed ourselves, together with the rest of the global village, as represented within the IPU family, to ensure full participation in the successful attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are also committed to the cause of self-determination of those countries that are still under occupation. In this regard, the situation in Western Sahara, often referred to as the Saharawi Arab Republic, and the suffering of the people of Palestine, amongst others, should not be forgotten.