

THE statement released by the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Information and Broadcasting, Mocks Shivute, on 10 January 2001, and covered extensively by the Namibian and foreign media cannot go without comment. Since Shivute has decided to use the pedestal of his position to handle this matter in the media, it is just pertinent that I use the same platform.

In the first place I respect Shivute's position, as a spokesperson for the Namibian Government, and his right and authority to defend his Government to the hilt.

Notwithstanding, I am convinced that as author of the article under Shivute's critical comment, I also deserve the right to make further observations on his outbursts.

First of all it was idle and pure speculation for Shivute to suggest that I needed to travel to Zambia in order to write an article on the security situation in Namibia. I wrote the article in Windhoek within the confines of Namibian borders because the contents were plain and open facts, of which all and sundry in Namibia are aware, especially the people of the Kavango Region. There was nothing secretive about the contents of the article for me to seek refuge out-

Maligned Journalist Responds To PS Outburst

side Namibia before writing the story.

Coming to the article itself it will definitely baffle the majority of Namibians for Shivute to describe my article as "devoid of any truth and obviously designed to fabricate and tarnish the image of the Namibian Government." The term "devoid of any truth" simply means that the whole article was concocted or the write-up was just cooked from the devil's world.

Whatever he means, I beg to question whether the Permanent Secretary was stating the Government's point of view or his own. Unless he is burying his own head in the sand like the famous ostrich, the Government and people of Namibia cannot ignore the fact that there is no peace in the Kavango area. Even Namibians living in areas far from this unfortunate region but have had access to the media during the year 2000 are aware of the fact that all is not well in the Kavango.

If that article is "devoid of any truth", let the Permanent Secretary ex-

plain why, during the course of the year, the Government introduced a military convoy to escort motorists travelling along the Trans-Caprivi Highway especially within the 200-kilometre stretch from Divundu to Kongola? Why was the dusk-to-dawn curfew introduced in April for those Namibians living along the Kavango River? Why have so many people (some of them in possession of Namibian identity documents) in the Kavango region been arrested, detained and deported on suspicion of collaborating with "Unita dissidents"? Why have close to 100 innocent people fallen because of bullets of Unita insurgents? Why have so many people been mercilessly wounded with their limbs chopped off?

The Permanent Secretary was too hasty in accusing the author of not having included the military escorts and dusk-to-dawn curfew in the article because he did not read the original author's article. Being a journalist himself, Shivute knows too well that as a

reporter he is not responsible for the editing of any article that gets into final print or broadcast.

Is the Permanent Secretary of Information not aware that the economic infrastructure of the Kavango Region is nearly run down? If not so why did the business people of that Region insist that the Angolan government pay reparations for those shops closed and looted by Unita insurgents during the year 2000? Unless he ignores these developments deliberately he should be aware of those meetings which took place between the Kavango Chamber of Commerce, the government of Namibia and representatives of the Angolan government. Unless he does not read his own newspapers (for which Ministry he is Permanent Secretary) let me challenge him to state whether retail outlets and hawkers are operating normally in the Kavango.

In addition, tourist organisations in Namibia were the first to acknowledge that the killing of the young French tourists and subsequent killings of Namibians along the Trans-Caprivi Highway and the general security situation in the region had harmed the industry considerably. This resulted in the retrenchment of several workers and near closure of some tourist camps and lodges.

He should also be aware that primary and secondary school education for Namibian children has been adversely affected. Even as early as this month, a school headmaster was brutally murdered by suspected Unita insurgents. Are you not aware of this? Are these malicious fabrications?

I am not only surprised but disappointed by Shivute's denial that no electricity pylons were blown up by suspected Unita bandits in the volatile region. I am ready to

give him dates, locations and published evidence of several acts of this vandalism. I consider the Permanent Secretary as a senior official of the Namibian government who should remain better informed of all developments in this country. The Government will only be correctly informed if those in authority like Shivute are better informed. I see a great risk of denying things that have taken place, were published in the media and never refuted before.

Let me state here that the article on the Kavango Region was not based on hear-say or unsubstantiated information. It was based on exhaustive research following several events that had taken place in the Kavango Region throughout the year 2000.

I wrote this article knowing very well that Zambia also shares a very long boundary with Angola in the Western

and North western provinces. Yes, a lot of cross-border clashes have taken place along this border, some of them resulting in deaths on either side. But the Zambian media have reported on these incidents without fear or favour and both the former Kaunda government and the present Chiluba administration have never overreacted to the truth. In fact, Zambia has borne the brunt of both Unita and MPLA incursions long before the independence of Namibia. But the media have never been intimidated.

As much as I am aware that I am paid by the Namibian Government for the job I do on the *New Era*, I am not aware that I am "biting the hand that feeds" me by portraying a potentially dangerous security situation which I still believe is public information in the interest of Namibia and the international community.

I believe that Namibia is not an island but a member of the international community to which the world citizenry has the right to information.

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