

A Long Waiting List For Housing Equity

Open Letter To Dr Klaus Dierks, Deputy Minister of Works, Transport and Communications

THE recent announcement by the Ministry of Works, Transport and Communication to the effect that Government houses are going to be put up for sale was met with joy and appreciation by a great majority of civil servants and the Namibian taxpayer.

There was appreciation and joy because these houses were no longer going to be a burden to the taxpayer. The civil servants also felt that finally there were going to be affordable properties available to them, in a housing market dominated by unreasonably inflated prices.

There are, however, deeper socio-economic and legal implications arising from the projected alienation of these houses than meet the eye.

If you were quoted correctly in the press, the most disturbing aspect of

the alienation process is the fact that most of these Government properties are currently occupied by high-ranking, high-salaried civil servants. These civil servants are paying, without exception, monthly rentals of less than N\$500 for high-quality residences for which they would normally pay not less than N\$3 000 on the open market.

When the Ministry of Works, Transport and Communication attempted to correct the anomaly of low rentals by ordering increases to at least 15 per cent of occupants' basic salary a counter-circular was immediately issued under the name of Mr Isaac Kaulinge, Secretary to the Cabinet, nullifying the instructions of your Ministry.

No indication is given by Mr

Kaulinge in his circular as to who authorised him to issue this circular as he has, so far as we know, no executive position. Even less is he authorised to countermand an instruction by a Ministry. The question then arises whether Mr Kaulinge and other top civil servants have some personal interest in maintaining the status quo in government housing schemes.

In spite of the low rentals they are paying, these civil servants had been contributing greatly to the deterioration of the value of these State houses. They have contributed nothing to the upkeep and maintenance of the houses, and even minor breakages like leaking taps had to be fixed by the Government. The gardens are not maintained and the fences and gates are broken down. Until recently, the Government

even paid for garbage removal from every Government house.

It is against this background that the very same occupants will now be given preference in the purchase of these properties, if your Ministry is quoted correctly.

This, in my view, is grossly unfair to those civil servants who have up till now failed to be allocated Government houses. Their names have been on waiting lists for many years. During these years they have been paying commercial rentals and mortgage bonds far beyond their means.

In some instances they have been paying high rentals for garages and crowded one-room outbuildings because the Government could provide them with no alternative housing while their colleagues sit comfortably in their

low-rental Government houses without any headaches as to where their next rental payment will come from.

I fully understand, Dr Dierks, that not every civil servant can be accommodated by the Government; there just are not enough houses available for 75 000-plus civil servants.

But why should those who have been left out be punished once again when these houses are up for sale by giving preference to the present occupants? What is the rationale behind giving preference to one civil servant over the other? What wrong have these poor people done to be excluded once again from fairly acquiring reasonably priced housing?

**NEVILLE ANGERMUND
WINDHOEK**

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