

# Govt Must Act On 'Rogue' Officials At Home Affairs

TWO articles have appeared in The Namibian during the last quarter (latest in April 11 edition) about problems at the Home Affairs Ministry.

As a person employed by an expatriate organisation for the last four years and whose responsibilities include securing appropriate permits for foreign experts coming to Namibia, mainly for capacity building and consulting purposes, I feel obliged to add my voice to attempts at informing the public about the state of decadence at the so-called 'Aliens Control' section of the said Ministry.

The point is, we do not have enough Namibian expertise in the field in which I work, and therefore we frequently import expertise. As a result I have been frequenting the corridors of this Ministry for the last three years and I have literally witnessed the retrogression taking place. Therefore, I can comfortably say the letters in The Namibian (one complaining about a would-be investor told to take his money back to his country, and the other complaining about Mr Mushelenga's response on a NBC programme which was found to be far different from what unfolds in that Ministry on daily basis) as merely exposing the tip of the proverbial ice-berg.

In a point-by-point fashion, I have pinpointed some of the glaring issues which reflect the present state of affairs at the institution in question.

1) The is no standardised system of handling enquiries at a place which handles hundreds of applications a day. Doing telephonic inquiries is virtually impossible. Even if you call the person whose name appears on the slip issued with an application submission, one gets referred to up to five officials, spends at least 20 minutes on the phone and still does not achieve anything.

Physical visits - which ultimately pay off - are also no mean feat by any means. I have seen and even experienced doors slammed in people's faces, people being yelled at, or a person who is supposed to work on your application simply lifting his/her shoulder and then you are stuck until a person feels like working on your application - and this can take weeks.

These attitudes are indiscriminate and certainly do not conform with GRN and the President's attempts to sell Namibia as an investor and tourist haven. Therefore, please intervene.

2) No state-of-the-art system of information management. An antiquated filing system is used. Such systems work in small establishments but an institution which handles citizenship documents, permits, passports and the other essential documents of 1,6 million Namibians and close to 100 000 (thumb suck) expatriates should at least have a centralised computerised system.

The present system leads to loss or misplacement of files (real or pretended); a cumbersome process of file retrieval and therefore, complaisance; open for abuse since there is no way to avoid issuance of more than the allowed number of the same document to one person. What this all leads to is gross inefficiency and undue delays.

Although Mr Mushelenga might say computerised systems are expensive and the State can not afford them, how about money lost through perpetuating an inefficient system?

3) Seniors do not seem to review and vet application before they are tabled at the immigration selection board (ISB). This results in the tabling of incomplete applications, and one's application gets referred back a number of times for one or the other outstanding document/information. This is at times

costs us high calibre consultants. These people don't wait for three months for a short-term work permit, they are always on the move.

4) Erroneous endorsements are also very common particularly at the points of entry. Once an acquaintance of mine, a Namibian citizen, was returning from the RSA and her passport got endorsed with a three-month holiday permit. When she discovered the fault and approached the Ministry, she had to take a lot of flak. I am convinced that there are many people out there who have had similar experiences. Please come out!

5) Passport renewals. Internationally, not many countries allow you entry on a passport which is valid for less than six month. As a result, many experienced and forward thinking travellers renew (or at least attempt to) their passports - which are not full but are simply expiring - during the last six months of validity. This rule is not applied at Home Affairs. Colleagues of mine travelling to non-SADC countries always get problems in this regard.

6) Although probably by choice, I have also noticed an alarming exodus of experienced staff from this institution in the period that I have worked with them. Most such people fall in the category of those who worked for the pre-independence establishment. The result is a general decline in effectiveness, inexperienced people left to themselves to handle at times complex issues, and the provision of inconsistent information. What makes this suspicious of late is the fact that when a person leaves and one tries to contact that person for inquiries, one gets told the person is on leave. Next thing is for one to find the particular officer working quite comfortably elsewhere - you know Windhoek is not big. I recently asked such an official whether he/she was doing a holiday job and she/he did not take it kindly. Whatever this means, it affects us, the "clients" of the Ministry, extremely adversely.

7) General attitudes of the staff. Everybody who has dealt with this Ministry even once will agree with me about the levels of arrogance, aggression, impoliteness and unprofessionalism characterising the business of this Ministry. Numerous complaints about particular offenders, who routinely slam doors in people's faces, have met with silence.

People subjected to this treatment are not only blue collar Namibians like me. They include tourists extending their visa, would-be investors, investors already in the country, virtually everybody without exception. Therefore, one wonders whether the following has ever occurred to the rank and file of this Ministry:

a) That our Government leaders are selling Namibia as the smile of Africa at every opportunity;

b) That GRN spends millions every year to promote Namibia as a tourist and investor destination through our missions abroad and with all official visits by Ministers and President Nujoma;

c) That every time we host a state/official visit for leaders of other countries, these leaders are accompanied by business delegations who make business contacts during such visits. These people normally come back in their private capacities (would-be) to follow up on these contacts and get subjected to this kind of treatment. They will obviously take their money elsewhere. This does not bode well for Government's drive to attract direct foreign investment.

Mr Prime Minister please intervene since the Government's collective image is being tarnished. We know that our southern neighbour is far sexier in the eyes of investors and does not have to put in as much effort to attract them.

If this state of affairs in the Ministry of Home affairs is allowed to continue, we are shooting ourselves in the foot.

I also understand that the Prime Minister's Office plans to launch an efficiency programme. I think Home Affairs perfectly deserves to be among the first clients of such a programme.

Finally, and little bit unrelated, when last have the fees of Namibian permits been reviewed. They are ridiculously low compared with what other countries charge for particularly work permits, permanent and temporary residence permits and study permits. I think the GRN is losing potential income. What about charging departure taxes at the airport particularly with the imminent commercialisation of the ports?

## TE HUUR

Besigheidspersele en Woonkamers  
Voortrekkerstraat Gobabis

- ❖ Billike Huur
- ❖ In Sakesentrum
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**EXTREMELY WORRIED,  
FORMERLY DISADVANTAGED**