

Namibia's Democracy Is Still New & Fragile

A FEW years ago Namibia was seen as a rising star in the eyes of international community, a model democracy for Africa, if not the world, because it championed democracy, peace and human rights.

Most of the people were generally happy then. Now the opposite is true for many people.

What has gone wrong with us Namibians - from leaders in the nation's Assembly to the ordinary man in the streets of Katutura or Keetmanshoop? What comes to mind is that the problem is partly our own making and partly due to being a member of the nations of the world as we have a share in their AIDS and conflict.

In fact, there is so much hatred, hostility and resentment among many Namibian people today within families, between ethnic groups and political affiliations.

Crime and other social evils around us are a manifestation of this. Families have lost their loved ones from AIDS or natural death but they are still blaming one another for the cause of death instead of giving each other solace. Tribalism is rearing its ugly head unnoticed, even at institutions of higher learning.

Although these evils have been and continue to be painful for many people, it is the historically neglected, marginalised, lower strata of society that is most affected.

One wonders what Namibia will be like in years to come. More importantly, party politics are also devouring our unity

as a country.

Apparently, some people no longer express issues from a national perspective, but from an ethnic or tribal point of view, such as "We Owambos, Hereros, Kavangos, Damaras etc", when addressing issues that matter to them in this newspaper and other media.

We must be cautious, sensitive and cognisant of the fact that our young democracy is still fragile and can easily be harmed by the use of such terms, which emphasise ethnicity (separation) instead of nationality (unity).

Likewise, some people prefer to use name-calling, blaming when addressing and attempting to resolve issues, instead of talking objectively and maturely.

People in authority and the layman alike are guilty of this practice. Some people or groups are singled out as the adversary, to be eliminated from Namibian soil. I don't think it's a good idea. It has never worked in the past and it won't in the future.

History speaks for itself, and this is not a new phenomenon.

Pharoah's persecution of the Jews in Egypt, Hitler's dream for a Third Reich rule of a thousand years, Stalin's reign of terror in the 1930s, Verwoerd's inhuman Apartheid system, Bosnia Serbs ethnic cleansing in the 1990s, and more recently the Burundi-Rwanda genocide which shocked the world.

I don't think that any peace-loving Namibians would like to get into any of these situations.

To some, extremists

expressing an opinion different from the popular views of the majority is now synonymous to quibbling, it is unnatural and traitorous.

Democracy can't flourish in an environment which is intolerant to a divergence of ideas and opinion.

Like-minded people can't build a strong and stable democracy since it promotes dictatorship, stifles creativity and the country suffers in the process.

I strongly believed that each individual, irrespective of his/her economic or social status, is entitled to express his/her views, without fear of being victimised or ostracised. Our Constitution guarantees this right. Many Namibians today are afraid to raise their opinions openly. In my view it is like knowing there is a mamba in the house and not doing anything about it - hoping that it will get out, but it won't.

All these aforementioned issues are trivial as far as I'm concerned. The real threats to our country's future are the north-eastern regions' security situation, AIDS, crime and poverty to name a few. These take precedence over ideological or ethnic differences. These are our enemies and what we should fight, not one another.

I want to see Namibia as a glowing star emitting lights in the SADC region and to the rest of the world, not like a supernova which is ready to explode.

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