

# Mocks Shivute On Government And Media

THE Government of the Republic of Namibia welcomed the gathering on press freedom, attended by media practitioners across the globe, which took place in Windhoek on May 3, 2001. The Government further regards the meeting as having been a valuable forum to address the challenges facing the media in southern Africa, as well as an opportunity to investigate better co-operation between it and the media, especially regarding matters such as an improved flow of information.

Generally the meeting proceeded positively, with a constructive and open exchange of views and

opinions. It is therefore a great pity that, at the same time, certain quarters also used this meeting as a platform for indulging in attacks upon the Namibian Government and departing from the positive spirit which prevailed at the Conference.

In this context, the Government of Namibia takes strong exception to the recent accusations levelled against it by the so-called 'Co-ordinating Committee of Press Freedom Organisations' of 'violating elementary principles of press freedom'. The Government further took exception to the headline carried by *The Namibian* which

reads, "Rights groups turn spotlight onto the Govt". This headline sought to convey the sinister impression that the government of Namibia was put in the dock. We reject any notion to portray the conclusions of the conference as having indicted the Government.

The gist of this so-called, self-constituted committee's complaints revolve around three issues, which on closer examination, are found to be without substance whatsoever.

The accusation that President Nujoma had used the conference to berate the press, the advertising ban on *The Namibian* newspaper, as

well as a ban on foreign journalists covering other events apart from the Conference itself, are used as fodder to question the Namibian Government's commitment to freedom of the press.

It is clear from the speech of the President, that he used the venue to raise issues of importance regarding the proper role of the media in a democratic society. It appears, from the reaction of this group, that to raise issues which certain sections of the media may be uncomfortable with, represents a threat, as if it is they who are the sole arbiters of what is permissible debate, and which is not. The

Government rejects this contention, as would other self-respecting democratic society.

The reasons for the advertising ban on *The Namibian* have been adequately addressed before by this Government, and need no repetition. Suffice it to say that, whether other parties agree with these stated reasons is a legitimate point of debate. To say, however that this amounts to threatening the survival of the media is at the very least a distorted rendering of the true situation. Ultimately, Government has a mandate on which policies to pursue regarding the use of the tax-payers money, a mandate reaffirmed in every election since Namibia's independence. It is not compelled to subsidise the survival of newspapers, which patently harbour a deep-seated antipathy to its policies and its leadership. The role of the Government is merely not to interfere with the rights of the media to publish in a free and unfettered manner, and to create and support an environment in which freedom of the

media can prosper. This Constitutional imperative has not been interfered with, despite the hysterical cries of this group.

Regarding the question of delegates to the Conference reporting on issues beyond the Conference itself, Namibia requires all visitors to our country to stick to the conditions under which they were allowed entry into the country. The delegates received courtesy visas allowing them to report from the conference, and if they had desired a work-permit to practice as journalists in an unfettered manner, they should individually have applied for these permits before the time, and their requests would have been duly considered. As all the participants to the Conference were aware of the conditions attached to their visas, to which they had acceded, it is once again a misrepresentation to accuse the government of 'censorship' for requiring them to stick to the conditions of their visas.

It should be clear from the Namibian Government's policies and track

record on this score that the media remains unhindered in carrying out their duties, provided they adhere to the laws regarding accreditation and obtaining of the necessary permits. These requirements are in line with internationally accepted standards, and neither in Namibia or anywhere else, amount to a violation of any 'elementary principles of press freedom'.

## MOCKS SHIVUTE Windhoek

*Note: Despite the Government advertising ban, it is noteworthy that you continue to send us your almost weekly letters of rebuke for one thing or another. We will not 'ban' you in turn, but would urge you in future to keep your letters short. Also the Government has never 'subsidised' The Namibian. We imagine you got good returns for your ads when you placed them. As mentioned before, The Namibian puts more in Government coffers each month than Government put in ours, even when they were still advertising. - Ed*

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