



**REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA  
MINISTRY OF URBAN AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

**WELCOMING REMARKS BY HON. SANKWASA JAMES  
SANKWASA, MINISTER OF URBAN AND RURAL  
DEVELOPMENT, AT THE WORKSHOP ON THE  
AMENDMENT OF THE TRADITIONAL AUTHORITIES  
ACT OF 2000 AND COUNCIL OF TRADITIONAL  
LEADERS ACT OF 1997**

**13 APRIL 2026  
OTJIWARONGO  
OTJOZONDJUPA REGION**

**Director of Ceremonies,**

**Chairperson of the Council of Traditional Leaders,  
Gaob Immanuel /Gaseb**

**Deputy Chairperson of the Council of Traditional  
Leaders, Tatekulu Omukwaniilwa, Fillemon Shuumbwa  
Nangolo**

**Traditional Leaders and Members of Traditional  
Councils,**

**Executive Director of MURD,**

**Representatives from the Ministry of Justice,**

**Staff Members of MURD**

**Distinguished Guests**

## **Ladies and Gentlemen.**

1. It is with a deep sense of honour and commitment to our traditional leaders that I stand before you today. I am pleased to welcome you all to this crucial consultative workshop, which aims to review, amend, modernise and even to overhaul the entire Traditional Authorities Act, 2000 (Act 25 of 2000) as per our agreement at the meeting that we held on the 5th February 2026 at Windhoek. In this same occasion, we will also confirm the inputs that we provided on the amendment of the Council of Traditional Leaders Act during the said meeting that we held in Windhoek.
2. Let me take this moment to thank you and acknowledge the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson of the Council of Traditional Leaders Gaob Immanuel /Gaseb and Tatekulu Omukwaniilwa, Fillemon Shuumbwa Nangolo, and our esteemed Traditional Leaders who travelled from various regions of our beloved country to join this

workshop. Your presence here testifies to your dedication to serving your communities and strengthening the legal framework that governs the affairs of traditional authorities. In the same vein, I extend my sincere gratitude our Facilitator and drafter Advocate Harmse as well as our technocrats including legal officers from the Ministry of Justice and Labour Relations for their presence and for the crucial role that they are going to play during this workshop.

**Director of proceedings, esteemed Traditional Leaders, and Ladies and Gentlemen**

3. The Traditional Authorities Act of 2000 and Council of Traditional Leaders Act of 1997 have served us for over two decades. While it provided the foundation for recognizing and regulating traditional communities after independence, we must accept that the landscape has changed. We are facing unprecedented challenges, including ongoing leadership succession disputes, mushrooming of traditional communities seeking recognition, the need for improved financial

management, and the dynamic environment in which the Council and Traditional Leaders are operating which makes some of the provisions of the two Acts to no longer serving their purpose. Furthermore, new needs and challenges have arisen which call for new or an amendment of existing provisions.

4. The implementation or operationalisation of the current proved problematic in its current form. The current Act is being used for political gains than the promotion and preservation of our traditions, customs and cultures.

**Director of proceedings, esteemed Traditional Leaders, and Ladies and Gentlemen**

What do I mean by this statement?

Just by looking at the definition of Chief in section 1 of the said Act stating:

In this Act, unless the context indicates otherwise -

“chief” means the supreme traditional leader of a traditional community designated in accordance with section 4(1)(a) and recognised as such under section 6,

read with the definition of a “communal area” means the geographic area habitually inhabited by a specific traditional community, excluding any local authority area as defined in section 1 of the Local Authorities Act, 1992 (Act No. 23 of 1992); one comes to a conclusion that something is seriously wrong with this particular law and its intended application.

Is traditional community similar or equivalent to a particular tribe that members of such a community form part and parcel of? Are Chiefs in Africa responsible for ruling communities or tribes? Does a community form a tribe, if so, how many tribes shall we form in Namibia?

A tribe is usually defined and identified by shared ancestry, culture, customs, language, and social structures that foster a strong sense of a given community and identity among its members. There are several defining characteristics which distinguishes particular tribes from one another, which may include social structure, shared customary and cultural practices, common language, beliefs and values, and rituals. Tribal

identity is usually closely linked to the concept of membership and belonging, with each individual understanding their role and responsibilities within the given community. On the other hand, community leaders are often seen as representatives of their communities, at one central hierarchical point, whether based on geographical location or shared interests.

The implementation and misunderstanding of the current traditional authorities Act has divided various tribes into so many splinter groups based on geographical areas than our ancestry lineage, customs, cultures, traditional and ritual practices. Namibia is becoming more divided through the want of various communities from the central cohesive centre of tribal or traditional leadership than being united. Every small group wants to become a recognised traditional authority.

The challenge in the understanding and implementation of the Act by both the Ministry and citizens lies in the failure to distinguish between a CHIEF (Omukwaniilwa, Fumu, Gaob, Mulena, Ombara, etc and community

leader who are Mwene-o-Mukunda, Silalo- Induna, etc. now every district head- man is referred to as Chief than district headmen or head-women. We cannot continue on the trajectory and expect Namibia to remain united. This approach is in tandem with section 4. (1) of the current Traditional Authorities Act 25 of 2000 stating that

*“Subject to sections 5 and 6, members of a traditional community who are authorised thereto by the customary law of that community, may designate in accordance with that law -*

*one person from the royal family of that traditional community, who shall be instituted **as the chief or head,** as the case may be, of that traditional community; or*

*if such community has no royal family, any member of that traditional community, who shall be instituted as head of that traditional community”.* This provision does not mean everyone or every community must be recognised as a chief or traditional authority.

The government, as directed by Her Excellency, the President, is committed to upholding the rule of law and ensuring that traditional leadership functions efficiently and without unnecessary division. We cannot allow the continuation of such splitting or infighting between members of tribes to hinder community unity and development. As a solution each existing traditional authority will soon be required to clearly demonstrate how it came in to being as a traditional authority and why not just a district or sub-traditional authority under the main tribal or traditional authority that existed.

### **Esteemed Traditional Leaders, and Ladies and Gentlemen**

5. During our deliberations, let us look critically at these Acts, let us go through the amendments that have been proposed so far and let us amend them to fit the Namibia circumstance to make traditional authorities a hope of peace and tranquillity of our communities.

6. Let us focus on strengthening governance and accountability when we are going to provide our insights into the amendments of the two Acts.

7. I call on all of you to engage in open, honest, and constructive dialogue over the next five days of this workshop. This is your opportunity to shape the laws that will govern your communities for the next generation. Let us work together to ensure that our traditions and customs continue to foster peace, unity, and development, rather than conflict.

8. I look forward to fruitful discussions and sound recommendations that will embrace or foster unity in Namibia.

9. With these few words, I declare this workshop officially open

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