



**WOMEN'S ACTION FOR DEVELOPMENT
(Incorporated Association Not For Gain)**

P.O. Box 370
Windhoek/Namibia
Tel: (+264-61) 227630
Fax: (+264-61) 400156

3 Rühr Street,
Northern Industrial Area
E-mail: info@wad.org.na
Website: www.wad.org.na

**REMARKS BY VERONICA DE KLERK - WAD EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
DURING A MEDIA BRIEFING TO ANNOUNCE HER RETIREMENT
THURSDAY, 21ST AUGUST 2014**

Ms Kadhikwa; Mr Shinedima; Members of the Media:

I wish to welcome the members of the media at this Briefing and I thank you most sincerely, for your regular attendance at our briefings.

I am a firm believer in the principle that if something is worth doing, it is worth doing well!

WAD has provided me a life-enriching opportunity to live out that principle and at the same time, to live out my convictions about the role of NGOs in strengthening the hand of Government in its efforts to alleviate poverty and unemployment, and in so doing, to serve the people of the country.

The guiding principles of meticulous administration, sound financial management, staff discipline, honesty and dedication, during my term of office as Executive Director of WAD, can be universally applied and will serve any nation well.

All NGOs in Namibia should realize the great responsibility and exciting opportunities which beckon to be exploited in our country.

Directors:

**Rev. Phillip Strydom (Chairperson); Ms Veronica De Klerk (Executive Director)
Bishop Dr. Zephania Kameeta; Ms Twapewa Kadhikwa; Rev. Nangula Kathindi; Prof. Osmund Mwandemele;
Mr Martin Mwinga; Ms Hilde Nashandi; Commissioner Hilma Tweya;**

This is an area of great potential and profitable progress, in terms of human development and good governance which awaits a future closer partnership between Government and the NGO fraternity.

In this regard, Government Ministries should embrace the exemplary potential of NGOs, which are generally fast-moving and not plagued by bureaucratic delays, to assist in implementing their programmes, in order to fast-track the reduction of the high rate of poverty and unemployment in the country.

I trust that we will see the day when the services of NGOs will be utilized by Ministries to a large extent, on a continuous basis.

Although I still have loads of energy and although there are still many ideas competing in my mind to be implemented, I believe that a leader, whatever his or her success, should realize that there is a time to come and a time to go.

A leader should timeously make room for the younger generation to take over the reigns, in order to introduce new approaches and alternative ways of addressing challenges of national importance.

The Board and I are therefore, very pleased to introduce my successor of the caliber of Mr Salatiel Shinedima to you. Mr Shinedima, who hails from the Oshana region, was mentored by myself for a couple of years when he was in the employ of WAD and at which time he was managing huge projects for the organization.

During this time, it was not long before I realized that, although fresh from the University of KwaZulu Natal in South Africa, where he completed a Master's degree in community development, Mr Shinedima was a very special young man.

When he joined the WAD team, Mr Shinedima rapidly showed full understanding and insight into the multi-faceted programmes of the organisation, in a remarkable manner.

He is a natural leader with a sharp intellect, an excellent communicator, and thrives on challenges. He makes very useful and farsighted inputs during training workshops and conferences which cause all people who cross his path, to respect him for his clear perspectives and thorough understanding of the challenges facing women and poor communities.

My name has been closely associated with Women's Action for Development for close to 20 years, but now the time has come to announce that I am stepping down to retire, with a very competent successor.

With the appointment of Mr Shinedima, WAD is introducing a new approach with a bold young man who is prepared to take up the cause of women - a man who is proud to run with the national agenda of women and to face the challenges head on, which many men experience, in recognizing women as equal partners in society.

Ladies and Gentlemen - with regard to the numerous challenges currently facing women, such as violence against women, the rape and brutal killing of women; poverty, unemployment; and the inequality of the genders - what Namibia needs right now, are dynamic and fearless male role models in society, who have the courage of their conviction to address these evils, boldly and without fear.

It is well-known that women still have an uphill battle to fight in Namibia, in terms of their safety and security, acknowledgement of their worth and rights, harmful cultural practices that impede their development, etc - and without dedicated proponents of that cause, it may fade in the national conscience.

WAD is therefore taking a new and calculated approach to use more men in its programmes in order to address these steadily growing challenges in society.

We have seen too many women's workshops; women's demonstrations; women's conferences, women's marches....**without the inclusion of men**. The time has come for women to stop talking in a vacuum during these interventions where men are not present to hear what women are saying about them. If men are not present to participate in these discussions, women will forever be talking in a void and men will forever not know to what extent their actions are a threat factor in the lives of women and their children.

Poverty, unemployment, abuse, inequality, cultural oppression, etc have become synonymous with women, and until that scourge has been greatly addressed and reduced, the human dignity of women will not be restored. ...And let us be frank - men have caused many of those challenges facing women - men should

therefore, be bold enough to climb in, boots and all, to help to root out those challenges.

There is no doubt that young and innovative minds of men, are urgently required to make a greater impact and to further the agenda of women in the country.

It is thus, my sincere plea that the media and the nation as a whole, will embrace this young man and afford him the loyal support which I was privileged to enjoy from the media.

The media has been a very strong ally of WAD in disseminating the WAD message across the country. The media should therefore, receive full credit in being developers of remote communities and for sensitizing women about their rights, just as much as you were the loud hailer of the atrocities which men in Namibia are committing against their wives and partners, or even their own children.

Mr Shinedima has worked with me for many years. He is fully aware of the operational programmes and structure of WAD and he is very well equipped to take the organization to even greater heights. Since he hails from the north of Namibia, he is well acquainted with the cultural baggage of gone-by years which the majority of women in Namibia are still exposed to. For me, this is still unfinished business for the women of Namibia.

Areas which are very close to my heart, are the revival and reinforcement of the influence of the parental home, as a fast-fading force of upbringing of our children. Parental homes have sadly greatly lost their authoritative role as instiller of sound value systems and discipline in their children. Hand-in-hand with this, goes the lack of discipline in schools and the concomitant poor academic results, despite increasing financial investments in education.

Given the shocking spate of violence against women which we read about every single day in the mass media, we cannot help but assume that the parental home, the school, the church and other community institutions are ostensibly failing in their roles to prepare children how to live life as decent citizens or respectable young people.

This is a source of immense concern for our future generation. WAD and other civil society organizations will have to come forward more forcefully, to have the courage of their conviction to place the issues I touched on, on the national agenda of, for instance, those tasked with the responsibility to contemplate the learning content of schools.

The 50/50 representation of women, as announced by the SWAPO Party, is a milestone for women. It is here to stay, whether we like it or not, because **women have been assured by the Party that they will occupy those seats.**

The argument that women are too emotional to make sound judgements; that women are too weak; that women are too inexperienced or too ill-equipped in general to contribute positively towards decision-making processes, are rejected by WAD with the contempt it deserves.

It is within this context that WAD is pleased about its recent completion of 65 workshops country-wide in which close to 2 000 women were prepared on how to run for political office. No political party was excluded from those workshops and we are satisfied that we had reached the desired results at which men were included as well .

In this regard, WAD believes that the playing field for women can only be levelled by legislation, which would compel all political parties to introduce the same policy in order to wipe out the embarrassing shame of inequality of the genders, 24 years after Independence.

In this regard, I wish to caution that the longer we procrastinate with such law, the longer political parties will find excuses to give equal representation to women on their party lists.

The uncontrolled availability of alcohol through the seemingly uncontrolled mushrooming of shebeens and addictive drugs to all who have money, including children, should be addressed by Government as a matter of great urgency because it reflects a disease within a community which will soon cause its self-destruction. NGOs should therefore, greatly assist Government to combat these evils.

Focusing on the Youth: Because of the high unemployment rate in the country, especially among the youth, all our workshops are continuously over-subscribed. It is so sad when we are compelled to send young people away because of budgetary constraints. I was hoping that the re-introduction of practical subjects at secondary school level will materialize before my retirement.

It sadly did not yet happen. I can only hope that the Ministry of Education will bring back practical subjects to secondary schools to enable school dropouts and school-leavers who are too poor, or who do not have the aptitude to advance to higher learning institutions, to acquire a skill to start own income-generating ventures when they leave school.

After all - all learners are not all endowed with academic acumen, and we cannot all become pen-pushers and occupy white collar job positions in the labour market which are already saturated, when the country acutely needs a practically skilled work force.

Ladies and Gentlemen: 20 years down the line, WAD has extended its wingspan to all regions of the country, with the support of 3 training centres; 107 Trainers and Community Voice members – women and men - successfully addressing their own social challenges, and solving them together as partners, with a sense of purpose.

WAD is pleased that, according to our training centres, out of those who received various socio-economic training, between 65% and 70% have found jobs in the labour market or have started own income-generating ventures.

With over 50 000 marginalized members (mostly unemployed young people), trained in various skills, mostly free of charge, we are pleased that we could also include members of the Defence Force; the Police Force; prison wardens and prison inmates, domestic workers, as well as commercial sex workers, to acquire skills to assume more honourable jobs.

WAD is grateful that these successes could take place in a favourable pro-women climate in which women's upliftment took centre stage, thankfully established by the Namibian Government and through the excellent support of the Ministry of Gender Equality & Child Welfare!

For this - and on behalf of all vulnerable people in the country, WAD expresses its sincere gratitude.

But all these programmes could not have taken place without the commitment and financial support of our faithful donors. In this context, I salute WAD's main donor, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and the German Government for its phenomenal support over the past 20 years, which translates to well over N\$40 Million, and which transformed the lives of thousands of poor people across the country. Without them, we would not have been successful. It is this kind of benevolence which brings the nations of the world together.

But allow me also to thank other equally valued international donors, which include: The European Union. the Government of the Kingdom of Spain, the Government of Sweden; the Technical Management Services from Israel; and a world-renowned Seed exportation company, "Nunhems" from the Netherlands, for their exemplary support.

My sincere gratitude further goes to our local BEE partners, the Old Mutual Namibia; Mutual & Federal; Nedbank Namibia; and Bidvest Namibia, who are assisting the organization to roll out its broad-based economic empowerment programmes country-wide.

I have no words to express my profound gratitude towards all these wonderful partners who have selflessly supported the organization and who have been a tower of strength and inspiration to myself, our staff; and thousands of members across the country.

Being in its 20th year of existence, WAD regards it as reason to celebrate its birth, and to thank all those who, along the way, joined WAD to realize, what few initially thought was possible.

Initially, some felt threatened, and ironically thought that WAD had a party-political agenda; others thought that we were doing all this to gain honour and glory - but forgetting that the WAD Board and its Management all along were pursuing an honest and noble agenda to complement the work of Government in its efforts to reduce poverty and unemployment in the country.

WAD's Gold and Diamond awards which it received from the "Professional Management Review" from South Africa, in three consecutive years with a small staff complement, is due to our highly committed staff members, who believed in WAD's Vision; and who walked this rocky road with me.

I assure you that the development of people can be a lonely road, with sheer passion and commitment, being the only light to show you the way to carry on.

I shall always carry WAD in my heart and be there for Mr Shinedima whenever he needs me. I appeal to the media to give him their whole-hearted support as they have given it to me. I shall be ready to further mentor and guide him on this highly challenging road.

I wish him the very best success as he takes over the reigns from me on the 1st of September, well-knowing that 5 years from now, I will be proud to say: *"WOW - is this what we actually started"*? **Thank you!**